

# Epidural discharge advice

Epidural analgesia can provide excellent pain relief following surgery. Complications are rare: a recent survey of over 700,000 such procedures in the UK found serious complications in less than 1 in 25,000. These are caused mainly by bleeding or infection inside the spine. Although rare, we believe early treatment may stop permanent damage so we look for signs while the epidural is in and after it has been removed. We do know that some problems may occur days or even weeks after this.

## Complications

### Infections

The site where the epidural was removed should be kept clean and dry to minimise the risk of infection. You or your child can bath/shower as normal once epidural line has been removed, as long as this does not interfere with other treatment. Infections can develop under the skin surface or more deeply, closer to the spinal cord and major nerves. Infections are very rare, but require urgent treatment with antibiotics.

### Bleeding

Bleeding within the spine may cause pressure on the spinal cord or spinal nerves. Fortunately, this is very rare, but should it occur an urgent operation is required to relieve the pressure and remove any blood clot.

### Headaches

A severe headache can occur after an epidural: incidence of this is roughly 1 in 200 patients. This happens because the lining of the fluid-filled space surrounding the spinal cord has been accidentally punctured. More information regarding post-epidural headaches can be found in the 'Headache after an epidural or spinal anaesthetic' leaflet on the website [www.youranaesthetic.info](http://www.youranaesthetic.info) or ask your nurse for a copy.

## Things to look out for at home

Once discharged, we recommend that you or your parents/carers continue to observe for signs of complication.

### These are:

- persistent or worsening redness or swelling at the epidural site (noting that minor swelling is common in the first few days post removal)
- persistent fever (temperature, sweats, shakes)
- any discharge from the epidural site
- intense headaches which worsen when upright or moving to stand, and ease when lying flat
- severe pain, previously not experienced, around the site where the epidural was removed
- altered sensation in legs and/or arms; numbness, tingling, weakness
- changes in bladder and/or bowel control, previously not experienced prior to epidural.

### If you experience any of the above:

- contact the paediatric pain team on 023 8077 7222 Bleep 2780 (during office hours).
- contact discharging ward outside office hours
- ward to contact on call anaesthetist to phone family back

Go to your nearest emergency department if the above is not possible. Please inform them that you have recently had an epidural.

- Epidural removal date:.....

## Further information

We hope this leaflet will help you understand the use of epidural for pain relief. If you feel that more information is required, please speak to the paediatric Pain Team on 023 8120 5134 or ask the nursing and medical staff on the ward.

### For more information, you may find these websites useful:

- Association of Paediatric Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland: [www.apagbi.org.uk](http://www.apagbi.org.uk)
- Royal College of Anaesthetists: [www.rcoa.ac.uk](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk), [www.youranaesthetic.info](http://www.youranaesthetic.info)

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

[www.childrenshospital.uhs.nhs.uk](http://www.childrenshospital.uhs.nhs.uk)