



Royal Berkshire  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Care of your BCG vaccination site

Information for patients,  
parents and carers

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**This leaflet is for people having a BCG vaccination – this is usually children under the age of 16 years. Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) was developed by Calmette and Guérin at the Pasteur Institute (Lille), and contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germs) that cause tuberculosis (TB). It does not cause TB but helps you to develop some protection against the disease should you ever come into contact with it.**

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### **Care of the BCG vaccination site**

The vaccine injected into the outer skin layer makes a small white 'bleb' which will disappear within 20 minutes. In most cases, the BCG causes a reaction at the injection site, usually between **2-8 weeks after the vaccination**. A small red lump, often containing sticky fluid (pus), may develop. It is quite normal for the area to ooze pus. This will eventually crust over and a scab will form which will then fall off leaving a scar. This can take weeks or months to completely heal

**Do not pick, knock, scratch or wash the site or scab.** It will make it sore and it will take longer to heal. It may then get infected and cause a bigger scar. Do not use cream or lotions on the site until healed.

It is important to **keep the BCG vaccination site dry and let the air get to it** as much as possible. Do not cover it. Wear light clothing if needed, but avoid tight and itchy clothes such as woollen jumpers.

**Do not keep getting the area wet** and certainly not soggy. If you are swimming, cover the site with a waterproof plaster. Remove the plaster as soon as possible afterwards and pat the skin dry. For a bath or shower, do not cover the area but be careful not to rub it. Again, pat it dry afterwards and leave exposed to the air.

With care, the BCG vaccination site should not cause any problems. After several weeks, although sometimes longer, the scab should drop off and leave a small red mark which will fade slowly over time leaving a small scar.

## **Possible side effects**

Severe allergic reactions (redness/swelling of the face, neck or throat; skin rash; breathing difficulties) may occur in rare cases. You will be asked to sit in the waiting room for 5-10 minutes following the vaccine to make sure that you are in easy reach of urgent medical assistance, should this happen.

**Uncommon side effects:** (may occur in less than 1 in 100 cases)

- Fever.
- Swelling of lymph nodes in the armpit larger than 1cm across.
- An oozing ulcer at the injection site larger than 1cm across.

**Rare side effects:** (may occur in less than 1 in 1,000 cases)

- Inflammation of lymph nodes, sometimes with oozing ulcers.
- Infection with the vaccine bacteria which can spread throughout the body.

## **Repeat BCG vaccination**

Due to the risk of adverse reactions if the vaccine is given a second time, repeat vaccination is not recommended, even if some leakage is seen when the BCG is given.

## **Further advice**

Do not have any injections in the same arm as the BCG for three months, or until the site is healed.

**If you are experiencing problems with the BCG vaccination site, or are concerned, we recommend you first contact the TB team during working hours Monday to Friday on: 0118 322 6882.**

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Department of Respiratory Medicine (TB Service), January 2008

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