

What is a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture is a procedure which is carried out to get a sample of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) for testing. CSF covers the brain and spinal cord. A sample is obtained by inserting a special hollow needle into the lower part of your baby's back and into the space around the spinal cord (this part of the spine is the easiest and safest to use). A small amount of CSF is collected and sent to the laboratory for testing.

What are the benefits of a lumbar puncture?

A lumbar puncture is commonly carried out for one or more of these reasons:

- to detect a possible infection (meningitis or encephalitis) in the CSF
- to measure the pressure in the CSF
- to measure certain chemicals in the CSF
- to reduce the pressure in the CSF

A lumbar puncture is usually done to diagnose or rule out meningitis, which is a serious illness. The results of the lumbar puncture can help the doctor to make a diagnosis and give your baby the appropriate treatment.

The doctor looking after your baby will talk to you about the exact reasons for having the lumbar puncture and the benefit of the test for him or her.

What are the risks?

Before the lumbar puncture is performed, the doctors and nurses will ensure that there are no reasons to avoid it, for example increased pressure in the brain or abnormal blood clotting.

It is unusual for something to go wrong, but very occasionally one of the following may occur:

- There is a rare risk of developing an infection at the site of the procedure but precautions will be taken to reduce this risk.
- Sometimes the doctor is unable to obtain a sample of CSF or it is too blood stained for analysis. In this instance it may be necessary to repeat the procedure.
- There may occasionally be some mild local trauma (bruising/swelling) to the area where the needle went in – this will resolve within a day or two.

What are the risks of not having a lumbar puncture?

If your baby does not have the lumbar puncture the doctor will not be able to make an accurate diagnosis and ensure they receive the correct treatment.

Contact us

Buscot Ward 0118 322 7430

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the nurse or doctor looking after your baby.

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Lumbar-puncture/Pages/Why-it-is-necessary.aspx

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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