



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Care of your BCG vaccination site

Information for patients,
parents and carers

This leaflet is for people having a BCG vaccination – this is usually children under the age of 16 years but adults may also be vaccinated. 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.

Care of the BCG vaccination site.

The vaccine injected into the outer skin layer makes a small white 'bleb', which must be left alone. This 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 pus, with scaling and blistering of the site may develop. It is quite normal for the area to ooze sticky fluid. This will eventually crust over and a scab will form. 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 much longer to heal and may get infected and cause a worse scar.

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 going swimming cover the site with a waterproof plaster. Remove the plaster as soon as possible afterwards, pat the skin dry and let the air

get at it. 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

If the nurse or midwife believes that the vaccine significantly leaked when it was given, they will document it in baby's red book. If there has been no reaction at all at the site after 10 weeks, we may consider repeating the vaccine.

Further advice:

Do not have any injections in the same arm as the BCG for 3 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

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

London Road

Reading RG1 5AN

0118 322 5111 (switchboard)

www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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

Berkshire TB Service, Department of Respiratory Medicine, January 2008

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