



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Care of your BCG vaccination site

Information for patients

This leaflet is for people having a BCG vaccination. 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 protection (immunity) 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 about half an hour. In most cases, although not all, the BCG causes a reaction at the injection site, usually between 2-8 weeks following the vaccination. A small red lump, often containing pus, with scaling and blistering of the site, occurs frequently. It is quite normal for the area to weep a little. This will crust over and a scab will then form, this may take a few months to 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 it is going to get soggy, for instance when swimming, cover the site with a waterproof plaster; take the plaster off as soon as possible, pat the skin dry and let the air get at it again. For a bath or shower, do not cover the area but be careful not to rub it at all. Again, pat it dry afterwards and let the air get to it.

With care, the BCG vaccination site should not cause any problems. After about 6-8 weeks, although sometimes longer, the scab should come off on its own and leave a small red mark which will fade slowly over time and eventually leave 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, should this happen, you are in easy reach of urgent medical assistance.

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, possibly abscess.
- Infection with the vaccine bacteria which can spread throughout the body.

Some side effects will require treatment.

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, please ring the TB service on:

0118 3228266

0118 3226882

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.

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