

Information for Parents or Carers of a child when there are concerns for child protection

Introduction

Under Irish law, health care workers have a duty to protect children. Staff are expected and encouraged to raise concerns if they believe the welfare of a child is at risk. Although this can be upsetting and difficult for parents/carers, your child's wellbeing and safety comes first. The doctor who sees your child in the hospital will have explained why your child is having these tests. If you remain unsure, please ask on the ward to see your child's doctor for more information.

Important Information

Who gets a Skeletal Survey?

When a doctor has concerns for the physical welfare of a young child, they will ask for a skeletal survey to look for new or old injuries which may not be visible on examination of the child.

What is a Skeletal Survey?

A skeletal survey is a series of X-Rays of all the bones in the body. A skeletal survey is an examination which takes place over two visits, two weeks apart.

The first part is done in the days after admission. The radiographer (specialised in taking X-Rays and scans) takes about 24 X-Rays of all parts of the body. This can take up to an hour. Having an X-Ray is like having photographs taken and will not cause any pain. However, your child must be held still for a few seconds while each image is taken. This will be done by trained staff with your help where appropriate. Distraction with toys or music is frequently used to make this easier for children. You may want to bring your child's favourite toy or comforter to help with this. Children can become upset during the exam. There will be an opportunity to comfort them between X-Rays.

You are welcome to be present during the examination, but you will need to wear a special protective coat while holding your child to prevent your own exposure to X-rays. If you are not present during the examination, your child will be looked after by trained healthcare professionals.

The second part of the skeletal survey happens 11-14 days after the first part. It happens even when the first set of X-Rays are normal. This involves a repeat of about half of the original X-Rays. The reason for this is that some fractures cannot be seen on the original X-Rays and will only become visible with healing after this time.

Other Investigations

A CT scan of the brain is part of the investigations for all children under the age of one and for some children over the age of one. The scan is quick and painless.

If there is an abnormality on the CT scan or if your doctor is still worried about your child, then your child may need an MRI of their brain and spine. An MRI can take up to 1 hour. As the MRI scanner is noisy it is common for young children to require sedation to stay still for this scan. The sedation medicine is given by mouth after fasting and your child will sleep for



Children's Health Ireland
at Crumlin

the duration of the test. Sometimes a general anaesthetic is required for your child to be perfectly still. If this is required, then the anaesthetic doctor will explain to you the details of the anaesthetic before your child has the MRI. Not all hospitals in Ireland can perform MRI scans for children so on occasion, a child may have to travel to another hospital for this test.

Who Performs a Skeletal Survey?

The skeletal survey happens in the radiology department. Two radiographers will take the images of the child for the skeletal survey. There will be another member of the healthcare staff present during the examination - this is usually a nurse. The radiographers who perform the X-rays, CT and MRI will not know the result. The images are reviewed by two radiologists (doctors specialised in reading X-Rays and scans). They will write a report and discuss the results with your paediatrician.

How to Prepare for a Skeletal Survey

Your child will not need any special preparation. It will be helpful if they wear loose-fitting clothes that are easy to remove. You may be asked to remove some of your child's clothing and jewellery or metal clasps, for example poppers on vests.

Risks

We are all exposed to background radiation in our everyday lives, from the earth, sky, food etc. The level of exposure to medical radiation is always controlled and kept to a minimum. Your child will not be exposed to any more X-rays than is necessary to complete the test, and to make sure that images are of a high quality without exceeding accepted doses.

The amount of radiation received for a skeletal survey is roughly the same amount as 1-3 months of background radiation. The amount of radiation for the CT scan is about 6 months, but this is a much more detailed exam, so any risk is outweighed by the benefits

There is no risk to your child from the magnetic fields and radio waves used during MRI scans. However, in the uncommon instance that your child has metal implants then it may not be possible for them to have an MRI. The radiographers will carry out a checklist for all patients and their parents/carers prior to MRI scan.

Remember: Ask your nurse if you are unsure about anything about your child's care.

Developed by: Department of Paediatrics

Issue date: September 2020

Review date: September 2023

Disclaimer & Copyright ©2020, Children's Health Ireland at Crumlin, Dublin 12. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is accurate and in accord with standards accepted at the time of printing.