

## Caring for your cannula at home

### What is a cannula and why would I need this procedure?

A cannula is a small plastic tube inserted into the vein in your arm or at the back of your hand in order to deliver your intravenous medicine.

### Who will insert my cannula?

The doctor, a registered nurse or a member of the IV team will insert the cannula for you. The practitioner inserting the cannula will make sure that the site will be cleansed with antiseptic cleaning agent to eliminate bacterial growth from your skin before insertion. That will make sure the site is thoroughly clean and dry. A small needle is then used to insert the cannula into the vein; the needle is then removed leaving only the cannula in place. Your cannula will have a transparent dressing placed over the top to keep it clean and in place. The cannula is designed to sit comfortably in your vein for up to 72 hours.

### What are the potential risks and side effects?

Having a cannula inserted can lead to a variety of infections. There are number of things that can increase the chance of infection, such as:

- Poor preparation of the skin before cannula insertion.
- Lack of proper hand hygiene before using the cannula.
- Hand and equipment are not clean.
- Dirty and loose dressing.
- Excessive handling of the cannula.

The most common complication is called phlebitis (an inflamed vein that can be identified by swelling and redness around cannula site). All these things can lead to germs infecting the site and if left untreated, these germs may make you quite ill.

### How do I take care of my cannula?

Your cannula is fixed with a transparent occluded dressing, this will help to keep your cannula firmly in place and allow the site to be clearly seen. Although the dressing is waterproof, it is best to avoid getting it wet whilst washing. Once the cannula is in place, you should feel no discomfort. You are encouraged to report any symptoms such as pain, burning, swelling, redness from the point of entry and discharges as these may mean that the site is infected or that the cannula is not sitting in the vein. If any of the symptoms occur please contact your doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

### What should I do if my cannula is accidentally dislodged?

If your cannula is accidentally dislodged there will be some bleeding from the site. Please follow these instructions:

- Please do not panic and do not attempt to reinsert the cannula.
- Apply finger pressure over the site with sterile gauze (which your nurse will give you when you are discharged) for five minutes. If you are on any blood thinning medication (Warfarin, Aspirin or antiplatelet medication) you may have to apply pressure for a little bit longer, and check when the bleeding stops.
- Apply a small waterproof plaster or band aid to the site.

- Keep the cannula in a plastic bag and bring it with you on your next visit to the hospital or your GP surgery for proper disposal.

## Sources of information

Infection Prevention and Control - East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust  
Haemostasis and Thrombosis Specialist Nurses  
IV Team - Conquest Hospital – Tel: 0300 131 4500, bleep number 2735  
IV Team - Eastbourne DGH – Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 4825,bleep number 0940

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 or by email at: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

**Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

EPIC 2: National Evidence-Based Guideline for Preventing Health Care Associated Infection  
The Joanna Briggs Institute, Management of IV Cannula, Vol. 2, Issue2, 2005.

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:  
Dr Barry Phillips, Tina Lloyd.

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