Your child's barium enema

This leaflet will answer some of your questions about your child's barium enema. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to Evelina London Children's Hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor, radiographer or a nurse caring for your child.

What is a barium enema?

A barium enema is an examination of the large bowel (colon and rectum). The bowel cannot normally be seen on X-ray images unless it is coated with a white liquid called 'barium contrast'. The procedure is carried out by both a radiologist (a doctor who uses X-rays to diagnose and treat illnesses) and a radiographer (a health professional that produces the images used to diagnose and treat illnesses).

The procedure is called 'fluoroscopic imaging' or 'fluoroscopy' and uses X-rays to view images in real time. When the bowel is coated with the barium, the radiologist is able to check how it looks and how well it is working.

Why should my child have a barium enema?

This test can provide information that will help the doctor make a correct diagnosis or decision about your child's treatment. Your child may need to have a barium enema to find out more about what is causing symptoms such as constipation or diarrhoea, blood in their stool, abdominal (tummy) pain, unexplained weight loss, or anaemia (low levels of iron in the blood).

What are the risks?

All X-ray examinations involve exposure to radiation in varying amounts. The length of time and level of exposure to radiation from X-rays in medical examinations is strictly controlled and kept to the minimum level that is possible. The doses that are used in medical X-rays are very low and are thought to be very safe. They are similar in strength to other sources of natural radiation that people are exposed to every day, also known as natural background sources, such as radiation from the sun and other stars.

The examination takes place in our children's fluoroscopy room that is designed specifically for children and young people, and offers very low dose radiation imaging.

Barium contrast may cause constipation. Please give your child plenty of clear fluids, preferably water, or anything else you would normally do to help prevent constipation. Barium contrast may also give your child white stools for a few days following the examination. This is normal and is not anything to worry about.

Are there any alternatives?

This depends on what your child is being examined for. The team looking after your child will assess which approach is the best option. Each request is also checked by the children's imaging team to ensure the most appropriate examination is carried out. If you have any questions please speak to the team who referred your child.

How can I prepare my child for a barium enema?

It is important that your child's stomach is empty for this examination. Therefore we ask that your child is not fed before the appointment for the times stated below.

Under 1 year old: Preferably no food or drink for at least **1 hour** before the appointment.

1 to 5 years old: No food or drink for **2 hours** before the appointment.

5 years and over: No food or drink for **4 hours** before the appointment.

Your child may be required to take bowel-cleansing medication before the barium enema, to allow the bowel to be seen more clearly. The doctor referring your child for the test will advise you on this.

Metal objects can affect the image, so please avoid dressing your child in clothing with poppers or zips. No other special preparation is required.

Older children may be asked to wear a hospital gown during the exam and to remove jewellery, glasses and any clothing that contains metal.

We have a selection of DVDs to help distract your child during the examination. Or you can bring a favourite toy with you, or they may prefer to watch something on your phone or tablet. There is poor signal in the room and so it's best to download content beforehand.

Consent – asking for your consent

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your child's care and treatment. You will be asked if you consent to the procedure when you are called into the fluoroscopy room. If you do consent, this verbally confirms that you agree to your child having the examination and that you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for your child. If you still have any questions or concerns on the day of the barium enema, please ask the radiologist or the radiographer.

Who can I expect in the room?

During the examination there will be a radiologist and a radiographer in the room. Sometimes a nurse can also be present, as well as a play specialist, which may be helpful for your child and the examination being performed.

What happens before a barium enema?

As the imaging involves the use of X-rays, we legally have to ask anyone with child bearing potential over the age of 12 whether there is any chance they could be pregnant. To do this we will provide a simple question sheet when you book in at the imaging reception. This will be checked by the radiographer carrying out the examination.

Before going into the X-ray room your child may be asked to get changed. The radiographer will advise if this is necessary, will show you to a changing room and provide guidance on what to wear.

What happens during a barium enema?

The examination takes place in our children's fluoroscopy room which is located in the Children's Imaging Department.

The radiographer will explain what will happen during the examination and then help your child get into whichever position is best for the imaging. As a parent or carer you may be asked by the radiographer to support or hold your child in a particular position (this depends on their age). If this help is needed, you will be asked to wear a lead coat to protect you from the radiation. If there is any chance that you could be pregnant, please let the radiographer know before the examination begins. If you are pregnant, we advise you to bring another family member with you to act as a supporter.

A barium enema involves passing a soft flexible tube into the back passage (rectum). This will be done carefully and it may cause discomfort but it is usually not painful. The large intestine is then filled via the tube with a fluid called 'barium contrast'. This contrast is visible on the X-ray images. A number of X-rays will then be taken as the contrast flows around the large intestine.

Once the X-ray images have been taken, most of the barium liquid will be drained away through the tube. The tube will then be removed from the rectum.

Following the procedure, your child will probably want to go to the toilet and pass out the remaining barium and air.

Although the examination itself usually only takes about 25 minutes, **please allow up to one hour** for the entire procedure to be completed, as sometimes we need to wait longer for the contrast to move through your child's large intestine for the final pictures.

Will my child feel any pain?

Your child may feel some discomfort when the tube is inserted into their back passage (rectum). We will use a lubricant gel to reduce discomfort when inserting the tube. It will also feel quite strange as the contrast passes around their large intestine, but this should not be painful.

What happens after the procedure?

Your child is likely to want to use the toilet for a time after the examination to pass the contrast. There are toilet facilities very close to the fluoroscopy room where the examination will take place. You are free to leave after the examination.

What does my child need to do after we go home?

Following the procedure you can continue with your child's usual diet. Please note the contrast may cause constipation so encourage them to drink plenty of fluids, preferably water, or do anything else you would normally do to prevent constipation.

Will my child have a follow-up appointment?

The pictures taken during the examination are carefully studied by the radiologist, who will produce a detailed report. The results will be sent to the doctor who referred your child for the test. They will discuss the results and any treatment your child may need with you. Your child should already have an appointment with the team who referred them. If not, please contact them to arrange an appointment to discuss the results of this test.

Contact us

Contact the Children's Imaging Department if you have any questions, **phone:** 020 7188 9218, or visit our website, www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk or www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **phone** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **phone** 020 7188 8801 **email** gstt.pals-gstt@nhs.net

Language and accessible support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the service your child is seeing.

NHS 111
This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111
web www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website
This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web** www.nhs.uk

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