



Short Synacthen Test

This leaflet is for parents and carers and explains what to expect when your child is recommended to have a test to find out how their adrenal glands are working.

Why does my child need this test?

This test looks at the function of your child's adrenal glands. The adrenal glands are situated above the kidneys and make the hormone cortisol, which is responsible for many functions in the body. The adrenal glands release cortisol during times of stress and illness to give the body an energy boost and help you handle situations better.

Does my child need to do any preparation before this test?

Cortisol levels vary during the day so can be difficult to measure. This means it is necessary to stimulate your child's body to release cortisol, so that the amounts produced can be accurately measured. If your child takes hydrocortisone or prednisolone medication regularly, they will need to stop taking this 24 hours before the test. The endocrine nurse will explain the exact timings of when your child needs to stop their medication before you come in for the test.

Your child can eat or drink normally before and during the test.

What does the test involve?

The short synacthen test is carried out in the morning (Expect to be on the ward for approximately 1-2 hours). Please attend Kempton Day Bed Unit on Level 3 Centre Block at the Royal Berkshire Hospital at 8am. Your child will need to have a cannula (a small plastic tube) inserted into a vein in their arm or hand before the test starts. This is so that blood samples can be taken from the cannula at specific times during the test. Your child will be offered a local anaesthetic cream or a cold spray to help numb the skin. Local anaesthetic cream takes about 45 minutes to work. Once the cannula is in place, the first blood sample is taken and an injection of synthetic hormone is given to stimulate cortisol release. Levels of cortisol are then measured after 30 and 60 minutes.

What shall I bring?

Some children find it reassuring if they can bring something familiar from home, such as a comfort toy, book or iPad. We also have an amazing Play Team, who can be involved in your child's care; they will be able to provide a range of suitable toys and activities. Please also bring in any medication that your child is currently taking.

Side effects

Most children experience no side effects from the test. **Very rarely**, a child may have an allergic reaction, such as include skin irritation, wheeziness and flushing. If these were noted, your child would be treated with appropriate medications.

After the test

Once the last blood test taken, the cannula is removed, and your child is allowed to go home..

Results

The Paediatrician (doctor) will contact you with the results of the test within a couple of days. If the test indicates that your child is not making enough cortisol hormone, they will need to start treatment. This involves taking oral medication in the form of a tablet or liquid. The endocrine nurse will give you the appropriate training regarding this.

Contacting us

You can contact the paediatric endocrine nurse on 07900 662 522 Monday-Friday or the Clinical Admin Team on 0118 322 7531 Option 2 or email rbb-tr.cat7@nhs.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Paediatric Unit, January 2025.

Next review due: January 2027.