

Contrast Extravasation

What Is Contrast Extravasation?

Contrast extravasation occurs when X-ray dye leaks into the tissue around the vein where the Intravenous (IV) needle was placed. During certain exams, contrast dye will be put into your vein with a needle so your veins, arteries and certain organs will show up more clearly on the scan.

Research shows contrast extravasation is a rare issue that occurs in less than 1% of patients. While you are having your CT or MRI scan, a staff member will stay with you so it can be detected early and, if necessary, stop the injection. Even with careful placement of the IV and extra precautions, extravasations can still happen. This information sheet will help you to understand what has happened, and what you need to know after you leave our department.

How Is Contrast Extravasation Treated?

When contrast extravasation happens, we have you raise your arm above the level of your heart and apply a compress to the IV site. An ice pack also helps to limit any pain you may have – both while you are at the hospital and over the next few days.

After You Leave the Diagnostic Imaging Department:

After you leave the Diagnostic Imaging department, follow these steps:

- Apply ice to the affected area for 15 minutes, remove for five minutes and repeat for up to four hours (to protect your skin, wrap the ice in a clean cloth before putting it on your skin); and
- After the first four hours, apply warm compresses for comfort if needed.

In rare cases, further treatment of the site is needed. Symptoms to watch for are:

- Ongoing pain;
- Swelling or tightness;
- Discoloration; and
- Redness, including redness that goes up your arm.

If you continue to have pain, discomfort, or swelling after the first 24 hours, please call your primary care provider to arrange to have the site checked.