

Short Synacthen Test

Information for Parents

Why has this test been arranged?

Your child has been prescribed a high dose of inhaled steroid and/or oral steroids, as their asthma has not been well controlled on lower doses.

Occasionally, when children have been on these higher doses for a while their bodies can stop making cortisol.

It is important that we are aware of this, as your child may need some additional treatment if they become unwell or have an accident.

What is cortisol?

One of the hormones produced in the body is called cortisol, which is a really important hormone because it helps the body cope with serious stress, such as infection or injury.

Cortisol levels in the body vary a lot throughout the day and can be difficult to measure. This means it is necessary to stimulate the body to release cortisol, so that the amounts produced can be accurately measured. The Short Synacthen Test is considered a painless and efficient way of doing this.

About the test

In this test, a substance called Synacthen, which closely resembles a natural hormone called ACTH (Adrenocorticotrophic hormone), is given to stimulate the body into producing cortisol. The levels of cortisol your child produces can then be measured by taking regular small blood samples during the test.

Procedure

If your child is having a Synacthen test only, he/she will not need to be fasted and can remain up and about throughout the test. If your child is currently on oral steroids, please **do not** give them the dose the morning of the test.

After arrival in the ward, the doctor or nurse will insert a very small plastic tube (called a cannula) into your child's arm, or in the back of their hand. The tube will remain in place until the test is finished, and will be used to give the Synacthen and to take small blood samples throughout the test. The test takes approximately 90 minutes from insertion of the cannula.

Your child can have 'magic' cream (which numbs the skin) applied up to an hour before the cannula is put in – this helps to make the procedure as painless as possible.

Symptoms

Your child should not experience any symptoms or side-effects from the Synacthen.

Follow-up

Your child should already have an appointment to be seen in the Asthma Clinic. The Asthma Nurses will contact you with the results of the test as soon as they are available.

Contacts

Please ask the doctors or nurses in the Planned Investigation Unit (Dirleton ward) any questions you may have, or contact the Asthma Nurse Specialists, Monday to Friday on **0131 312 0457** or via switchboard on **0131 536 1000**.

Royal Hospital for Children and Young People
50 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh
EH16 4TJ
Tel. **0131 536 1000**

Short Synacthen test
Information for parents