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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

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# ***A parent/carer's guide to blood tests in children*** (page 1 of 2)

Many children (and their parents) are anxious at the thought of having a blood test. This is a normal reaction and may result from fear of the unknown, a fear of needles or blood, or a previous difficult experience. The purpose of this leaflet is to explain the process so that both you and your child can be better prepared before any blood tests are taken.

Before any procedure, a child's anxiety can be reduced with reassurance from parents and professionals, with distraction (such as looking at picture books, playing with toys or singing songs) being very important during the procedure itself.

For some very highly anxious children and those requiring regular blood tests, play therapy can be helpful in trying to reduce their fears. Please speak to a member of staff if you want to find out more.

To help provide reassurance parents are encouraged to stay with their child whilst the blood is taken. However, if parents or carers are very anxious about their child having a blood test it may be more appropriate for somebody else to stay with the child so that the anxieties are not transferred to the child. If you have come alone with your child, then a play specialist or member of nursing staff will be able to help.

## **Does it hurt?**

For children over the age of about 1 year, we offer the use of a local anaesthetic cream (Ametop or 'magic cream') to numb the skin before taking blood. This takes about 20-30 minutes to work.

Alternatively, a numbing spray ('cold spray') can be used which has an immediate effect but lasts for less time and can make small veins harder to find!

Sometimes using numbing cream or spray is inappropriate - the doctor or nurse will be happy to discuss this with you.

Very young babies can be given a small amount of a sugar solution before blood tests. This has been shown to cause a release of natural painkillers, which reduces distress during blood sampling and other painful procedures.

## **How is the blood taken?**

Babies and children have small veins. This means that the standard could still be used for older children.

## **Heel prick samples**

Young babies often have blood taken from a 'heel prick' sample, similar to that taken by midwives and health visitors in the first few days of life.

**Day Assessment Unit**  
**01722 336262 ext 4201**

Some types of blood test cannot be obtained by this method.

### **Neo-safe**

This is the name given to a special needle which is put into a vein, and the blood drips out of the end into the collection bottles. It is most frequently used for babies and infants whose veins are too small to allow the use of a syringe and butterfly method (see below).

### **Butterfly**

This is the name given to a small needle attached to a plastic tube through which blood is collected into a syringe. This is most frequently used for older babies and young children.

### **Vacutainer**

This is the standard system used to take blood from adults and can be used for older children.

### **Cannulation**

If your child needs to have a cannula (or 'drip') put in so that medicine or fluids can be given into a vein, blood can be collected at the same time (see A Parent's Guide to Inserting a Cannula (or 'drip')).

## **Holding your child for a blood test**

It is essential that a child remains as still as possible whilst blood is taken. It is often the fact that their movements are restricted that is more upsetting for a child than any pain felt, which is over much more quickly.

If you are happy to be present during the blood test, you will be shown how best to hold your child to minimise their movements and shield the procedure from their vision.

## **After the procedure**

Once the needle is removed, pressure needs to be applied to the puncture wound to stop further bleeding. A plaster will then be put on the wound unless your child is allergic to them! For younger children, a reward such as a sticker is usually well received and helps them forget about the previous events. Lots of positive feedback is helpful.

## **Test results**

If you haven't already been informed, ask the person taking the blood test how you will be told of the result. Some results are returned from the laboratory the same day but others take much longer. If you have been seen as an outpatient, results will normally be sent in a letter. Inpatient results will usually be discussed with you while your child is on the Unit.

## **Further questions?**

If you have any further questions regarding your child's care, please speak to the staff looking after them who will be glad to help you.