Intramuscular injections of hydrocortisone for adrenal insufficiency
An instructional guide
Why has my child been prescribed an intramuscular hydrocortisone injection?

Your child needs to have hydrocortisone injections because they are hormone deficient. When a child is lacking a particular hormone produced by the Pituitary gland, he or she may be described as being deficient to that hormone. There are many reasons why the Pituitary Gland might fail to produce hormones. All the hormones lacking in a hormone deficient child can be replaced by daily medication in the form of tablets and/or injections.

What is the Pituitary Gland?

The Pituitary gland is a small pea-sized gland at the base of the brain which produces a number of hormones. Hormones are the chemicals that carry messages from one cell to another via the bloodstream. The hormones produced by the front part of the Pituitary Gland include those responsible for growth (growth hormone), sexual development (gonadotrophins), special hormones which stimulate the thyroid glands (thyroid stimulating hormone or TSH) and the adrenal glands (adrenocorticotrophic hormone or ACTH). The back part of the Pituitary Gland produce a hormone (antidiuretic hormone or ADH) which regulates the amount of water passing through the kidneys.
How will this affect my child?
Most hormone deficient children are otherwise normal children able to participate in all school activities. They should not be overprotected or treated differently from other children. However, hormone replacement therapy cannot be as efficient as natural hormone production where the body increases supplies of specific hormones when they are needed. Occasions arise, particularly when the body is under stress, when your child requires extra hormone medication and this is when your child may need an injection of hydrocortisone.

Why give intramuscular injections?
Intramuscular injections of steroid/hydrocortisone are given in emergencies:
- To prevent low blood sugar.
- To prevent low blood pressure. (Both of these are dangerous for your child.)
- If your child is involved in a serious accident with severe injuries, give the injection immediately and phone for an ambulance to take you to the nearest Accident & Emergency department (A&E).
- If your child has persistent vomiting and is unable to keep down steroid tablets on 2 occasions in a row, give the emergency injection of hydrocortisone and phone the ward or an ambulance to take you to the nearest Accident & Emergency department (A&E).

If you are in any doubt at all, the hydrocortisone injection should be given.
How to prepare an injection of hydrocortisone

Step 1: Breaking open the ampoule.
- Locate the coloured dot on the neck of the ampoule and apply pressure to the dot. Use a tissue when breaking the ampoule to stop you from cutting your fingers.
- Firmly break the top off the ampoule.

Step 2: Drawing up the Hydrocortisone
- Open the package and remove the syringe.
- Attach the needle securely to the syringe, keeping the cover guard on the needle to keep it sterile and to stop you from pricking yourself with the needle.
- Remove the needle guard and insert the needle into the ampoule.
- Pull the plunger back slowly to draw the Hydrocortisone into the syringe.

Step 3: Remove air bubbles
- It is important to remove any air bubbles in the syringe. To do this hold the syringe upwards and gently tap or flick the side of the syringe with your finger. This dislodges the air bubbles so that they collect at the top of the syringe.
- The air can then be removed by pushing up the syringe plunger until the air bubbles disappear through the neck of the syringe.
Giving an injection of hydrocortisone

- The injection should be given in the outer side of the upper leg.
- Divide the thigh into 3 parts between the hip and knee.
- Give the injection into the outer side of the middle third of the thigh.
- Stretch the skin between your thumb and forefinger.
- It is important to hold the syringe straight at a 90 degree angle to make sure that you inject into the muscle.
- Push the needle into the skin with a firm quick action and push down the plunger to inject the Hydrocortisone.
- Make sure you praise and reassure your child throughout the whole process. This will help your child to feel less frightened and will help them in not tensing the muscle.
- When the injection has been given, put used needle and syringe into the sharps bin provided.
Summary

- If you are in any doubt, give the injection.
- Make sure that you ring for an ambulance or go straight to your nearest accident and emergency department. Take care to make sure the needle is sterile and that all bubbles are removed from the syringe.
- Make sure you get the right site for the injection, stretching the skin and keeping the needle straight while giving the injection.
- Safely discard used needle and syringe in sharps bin.
- Reassure and praise the child during the whole process.
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Notes

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**Patients on Hydrocortisone Replacement**
In case of emergency administer ___________mg of Hydrocortisone Intramuscularly.

Name

Address

Home Phone No

Date of Birth

Hospital No

Hospital

Consultant

Children’s Ward

Endocrine Nurse

Hospital Switchboard
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Useful resources
The Child Growth Foundation
2 Mayfield Avenue
London
W4 1PW
Telephone 020 89950257

Useful contact numbers
NHS Direct
Telephone 0845 4647
Patient Services
Telephone 01709 424461
Health Info
Telephone 01709 427190
Stop Smoking Service
Telephone 01709 422444
A&E
Telephone 01709 424455
For GP out of hours, contact your surgery

Useful websites
www.nhs.uk
www.direct.gov.uk
www.therotherhamft.nhs.uk

If you require this document in another language, large print, braille or audio version, please contact Patient Information on 01709 424281.

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How to contact us

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