

Nurse Controlled Analgesia (NCA) pain relief for children

This leaflet explains about NCA pumps, including the benefits and risks. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

What is NCA?

It is a system that allows pain relief medicine to be given as and when your child needs it. NCA uses a programmed syringe pump, containing a syringe of medicine, which is given into a vein through a thin, plastic tube called a cannula. This allows the nurses to deliver a safe dose (bolus) of pain relief. It takes between 5 and 10 minutes for the medicine to start working. There may also be a small amount of medicine being infused into the vein continuously (called a background).

The pump is programmed with safety features to avoid too much medicine being given and is also set with the maximum amount of medicine that your child can receive.

It is important that the nurse is the only person to press the button to avoid any complications such as respiratory depression (a slower breathing rate).

Why should your child have NCA?

NCA is used when the operation is expected to be quite painful and requires stronger pain relief. It is also used when a child is unlikely to be able to eat or drink for a few days.

What medicines are used?

Morphine is used most commonly in the NCA pump. Morphine is a strong and effective pain medicine which is not addictive when given for pain relief. If your child is on high doses of morphine already, the anaesthetist will choose an alternative medicine.

Are there any side effects?

Sometimes the morphine can cause your child to become too sleepy and it may also slow their breathing rate. It can make your child feel sick, itchy and get abdominal pain with constipation. The nurses on the ward will monitor your child closely for all these

signs and will carry out hourly assessments on his or her pain, level of sedation (sleepiness) and any side effects. Medicines can be given to combat these side effects.

How long will my child need the NCA?

Most children will need the pump for two to five days although it can be continued for as long as needed. Your child's pain relief will be checked daily and when your child is feeding normally, the pump may be switched off and he or she may have the morphine by mouth or through a feeding tube.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the paediatric ward:
Pinckney 020 8725 2082

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Was this information helpful? Yes / No

Please let us know, contact patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk and include the leaflet title.

Thank you.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm
Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: PAM_NCA_01 **Published:** July 2025 **Review date:** July 2027