

Iodine-containing Contrast Medium

Patient Information

Radiology Tasmania

What is an Iodine-containing Contrast Medium?

Iodine-containing contrast medium (ICCM), sometimes called contrast, is a chemical substance often used during a CT examination. When injected into the body, ICCM can show what is happening in areas supplied by the circulatory system, such as blood vessels, the stomach, the subarachnoid space and around the brain.

How is the Iodine-containing Contrast Medium Given?

Prior to contrast being administered, you will be required to complete a health questionnaire. You must notify staff if you have any allergies.

ICCM is given by injection into a vein in your hand or arm. This will be performed while you are in the CT scan room by a Radiographer (health professional), trained in administering intravenous injections. Many patients will notice a very warm feeling that spreads throughout their body for about 20 seconds during and after the injection. This is often felt around the groin area and you might think you are passing urine, but you are not. This is a very common, very normal sensation and is nothing to worry about. The feeling will pass quickly in 1-2 minutes.

You may be asked to remain within the practice for a short time following an injection of ICCM.

What are the risks of Iodine-containing Contrast ?

ICCM is generally very safe, however side effects or reactions may occur. If you have experienced a

reaction to ICCM in the past, you must tell the Radiographer before your examination.

The most common adverse reactions are flushing in the face, nausea or vomiting, mild itchiness and sneezing. These reactions are mild, and do not require any special treatment and generally take only minutes to pass. Moderate reactions occur less frequently and reactions consist of severe or prolonged vomiting, hives or swelling of the face, mouth or throat making it harder to breathe and swallow. Staff at Radiology Tasmania are well equipped and trained in how to treat adverse reactions should they occur, and these reactions generally respond well to medical treatment.

Severe reactions are very rare and occur in less than 1 in every 25,000 people who have ICCM. A severe reaction may consist of very low blood pressure, inability to breath or cardiac arrest. These side effects are treated with emergency medical treatment and admission to hospital for monitoring.

Rarely, delayed reactions including salivary gland swelling and joint pain may occur a few days following ICCM. This seems to be more common in patients with abnormal kidney function. If your kidney function is reduced, you are at an increased risk of temporarily worsening your kidney function if you have ICCM. It is important that you advise us if you have reduced kidney function or disease, as permanent effects can occur in patients who already have a severely reduced amount of kidney function. Our staff are highly trained in how to administer intravenous contrast, though there is a risk of extravasation (leakage) at the injection site. If extravasation occurs, you may experience some localised pain around the injection site, swelling and redness. This may be treated with compression or ice and should subside quickly.

Information is from Inside Radiology, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiology (RANZCR)