

The HCG test

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatrics

What is the HCG test?

The HCG test measures the amount of testosterone your child is producing. Your child needs this test either because there is a problem with the development of their genitals or because they have early or late puberty.

HCG stands for a hormone called Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin. HCG is a hormone. Hormones are chemicals which carry messages to different parts of the body through the bloodstream. HCG is produced in the pituitary gland, which is a tiny pea-sized organ underneath the brain. HCG stimulates another hormone called luteinising hormone, which makes the testes produce testosterone. Testosterone is responsible for the development of the genitals and puberty in boys.

The test involves 2 blood tests and 3 injections and takes 4 days to complete.

What is the benefit of the HCG test?

The benefit of this test is that it will tell us if the amount of testosterone produced by your child is normal for their age and development. This will help your child's consultant to plan their treatment.

What are the risks of having the HCG test?

There is a risk that your child may get a headache, feel more tired than normal or experience mood changes during the test because of the HCG. They could also get some discomfort or itching in the area the injections are given. These symptoms do not last for long.

What are the risks of not having the test?

If your child does not have this test then their consultant will not be able to check if your child is producing the right amount of testosterone. This will make it difficult to plan treatment.

Are there any alternative tests my child can have?

There are no recommended alternatives to this test.

Preparing for the test

Your child can eat and drink as normal before the test. If your child is also having another test you will be told if they need to stop eating and drinking for this.

You should explain the test to your child before they come to the hospital so they understand what will happen.

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We have a playroom but please feel free to bring your child's favourite toy or comforter with you.

How the test is performed

Day 1

Please arrive on Priory Ground Ward at Sandwell General Hospital at the time you have been allocated. Please be prepared to spend several hours in hospital. If your child is having any other test at the same time you may have to stay longer.

When you arrive on the ward the nurse will check a few details like your child's name, address etc. They will also ask about your child's current state of health, and whether they have any medical problems, or have recently had or been in contact with anyone who has had an infectious illness. This is to check your child is well enough to have the test. The nurse will also give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the test.

Do not worry if your child becomes upset during the test, this is normal and will depend on your child's age and how much they understand about what is happening. Your child can eat and drink as normal during the test.

This is what will happen:

1. Your child's height and weight will be measured so we can work out the right amount of synacthen to give.
2. 'Magic cream' (called Emla) will be placed on the back of your child's hands and on the inside of their elbows. This is a local anaesthetic cream which numbs the area so that it won't hurt when they have a cannula (small plastic tube) put in. Magic cream takes about 1 hour to work so we will place a clear dressing over the cream to keep it in place.
3. Your child will have their cannula put in by a doctor. The cannula will be put into one of the areas that have been numbed either back of their hand or inside of their elbow. Your child may get anxious or upset when the cannula is being inserted. It will help if you stay with them for comfort.
4. The doctor will then take a small sample of blood from the cannula. This will be sent away to the laboratory for testing.
5. The doctor or nurse will give an injection of HCG into a muscle on your child's leg.
6. The cannula will be removed.
7. We will give you a 2 day supply of HCG injections and a prescription chart. You can then go home. The injections must be kept in the refrigerator.

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Your child may eat and drink as normal when you go home. They can also go to school and do their usual activities.

Days 2 and 3

A Community Children's Nurse will visit you and your child at home on days 2 and 3 to give your child the HCG injections. The nurse will tell you what times they will visit to give the injections, as it will depend on how old your child is. Your child can still go to school on these days.

Day 4

You need to bring your child back to the ward on day 4 so that your child can have a final blood test. This completes the HCG test.

How do I get the results of the test?

Your child's doctor will discuss the results of the test with you at your child's next outpatient appointment.

How to find us

The test will be carried out on Priory Ground Ward at Sandwell General Hospital. This is on the ground floor of the main hospital in the Children's Unit. You can ask for directions at the main reception desk near the main entrance to the hospital. Staff will be happy to direct you to where you need to go.

Address:

Sandwell General Hospital
West Bromwich
West Midlands
B71 4HJ

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about the HCG test please contact:

Dr Agwu - Consultant Paediatrician

0121 507 3358 (secretary)

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British National Formulary for Children, section 6.5.1 'Hypothalamic and anterior pituitary hormones including growth hormone: Chorionic gonadotrophin', July 2013
- Patient UK Professional Reference, 'Normal and abnormal puberty', June 2011
- 'Diagnostics of Endocrine Function in Children and Adolescents', M.B. Ranke, 2003

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5303 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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Incorporating City, Sandwell and Rowley Regis Hospitals
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ML5185
Issue Date: November 2015
Review Date: November 2018