

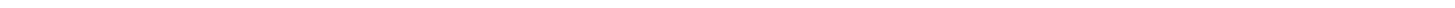


Sandwell and West Birmingham  
NHS Trust

# Carers and Comforters of Patients

Information and advice for carers and relatives

**Nuclear Medicine**



## **Who is this information for?**

It is sometimes necessary for a family member or friend to be present during or after an examination where ionising radiation is involved, either to support, provide care to or reassure the patient. This person is legally called a "Carer and Comforter" and will receive a small amount of radiation.

You may have been advised to read this information because a healthcare professional has identified you as a possible Carer and Comforter. It contains important information to reassure you that the radiation risk is very small and for most individuals this is balanced by the greater benefit of the diagnostic study that your friend/relative is undergoing.

## **Who should not be a Carer and Comforter?**

Please tell us if you are, or might be, pregnant so we can decide whether it is appropriate for you to act as a Carer and Comforter. It may allow the healthcare professional to make adjustments to make sure the dose to you and your unborn baby is as low as possible. Children (those under the age of 18) would not normally be considered for the role of a Carer and Comforter but exceptional circumstances can be considered. The healthcare professionals will be able to advise you about this should this apply to you.

Please ask the healthcare professional if you have any further questions or concerns prior to the start of the examination.

## **What is background radiation?**

We all receive radiation, known as 'background radiation' every day, from cosmic rays reaching the earth from space, radioactive minerals, certain foods and naturally occurring radon gas. In the UK, the average annual background radiation dose is 2.7mSv[1] but we receive higher amounts of radiation if we live in areas with higher radon levels, or if we take international flights. For example people living in Cornwall will receive around 7mSv in a year and a return flight from London to New York will add an additional 0.1mSv[2] to your background radiation dose.

## **How much radiation will I get by acting as a carer/comforter?**

Nuclear Medicine tests involve the administration of a small quantity of a radioactive drug usually as an injection into a vein. This can be detected by a special camera to create images of the inside of the body and its function. If you are required to support or assist a patient (including your child) during or after the test, then you will receive a radiation dose from being in close proximity to them. Your dose will be very small, and depends upon a number of different factors including the type of procedure, how close you are to the patient and the length of time spent near to them. You can reduce your dose by maintaining your distance from the patient and limiting the time you are near to the patient. You can also reduce your dose by delaying contact for as long as possible after the radioactive administration. Encouraging your relative/friend to drink plenty of fluids will help to clear the radioactive tracer from their body in a timely manner – this in turn will help to reduce the radiation dose you both receive.

Providing you follow the instructions from the healthcare professional we estimate that from supporting a patient in Nuclear Medicine, the radiation dose you will receive is likely to be below 0.3mSv. This equates to up to 6 weeks of natural background radiation.

## **Will I need to take any extra precautions?**

In some circumstances you may be asked to wear gloves or disposable aprons particularly if you are handling bodily fluids (including urine). Staff will advise about you about this matter and answer any questions you may have.

## **Do I have to say yes?**

Should you choose to not give informed consent to being a Carer and Comforter, we will not be able to proceed with the test today and your friend/relative will need to rearrange their appointment.

## **How long does this guidance last?**

This can vary depending on the specific test your friend or relative is having, but the vast majority of patients will have cleared the radioactivity from their bodies within 24 hours of their injection.

## **Contact details**

If you require more information after leaving the department, give us a call on 0121 507 4427 between 9am until 4:30pm Monday – Friday.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

## **References:**

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