Contrast Extravasation
When contrast leaks outside the vein

This handout explains what a contrast extravasation is, how it is treated, and symptoms to watch for.

What is a contrast extravasation?

During your computed tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, you were given contrast (X-ray dye) through an intravenous (IV) line. Contrast helps your veins and arteries show up clearly on the scan.

For some tests, the contrast must be injected very quickly. But, the faster it is given, the greater the chance of a contrast extravasation. This occurs when contrast leaks into the tissue around a vein. Extravasation happens in only 1 out of every 250 to 500 procedures.

Can extravasation be prevented?

Your safety is always our top priority. To prevent extravasation, we made sure we had good access to your vein from the IV. And, a member of our staff stayed with you during your scan so that any extravasation could be found early.

But, even with good IV access and staff watching, extravasations still happen.

How was my extravasation treated?

We asked you to raise your arm and we put pressure on your IV site. An ice pack was used to help limit pain.

What do I need to do next?

After you leave the Radiology department, follow these steps:
• Place an ice pack on the affected areas for 20 minutes every hour for the next 24 hours, while you are awake. Do not put the ice directly on your skin. Wrap the ice in a clean towel or cloth.

• After the first 24 hours, apply warm compresses for comfort.

• If you still have pain, discomfort, or swelling after 1 week, ask your primary healthcare provider to check your extravasation site.

When to Call
It is rare for more treatment to be needed. But, call your doctor if you have:

• Pain that does not go away

• Swelling or redness at the IV site

• An odd color in your skin at the IV site

• Redness that goes up your arm

Other Instructions

Questions?
Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Imaging Services/Radiology:
206.598.6200