

# Skeletal survey – a safeguarding investigation

Safeguarding Team



Patient information leaflet

This information leaflet will explain why a skeletal survey is necessary and what it involves.

## Why are any tests needed in this situation?

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NHS hospitals and all their employees have a duty to protect children. Staff are expected to raise concerns if they believe the care or welfare of a child is at risk.

Although this can be upsetting and difficult for those with parental responsibility, the child's wellbeing and safety comes first.

If any concerns are raised, it is important that these are investigated fully. As part of the investigation, it is essential to identify any injuries. In younger children and babies, injuries can be difficult to find. For example, bruising on the surface of the brain can occur without any apparent injury to the outside of the head. Similarly, bones may be broken without any obvious external signs. X-rays and scans can help to diagnose these injuries.

## What is a skeletal survey?

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A skeletal survey is an x-ray examination that involves taking separate x-ray images of different areas of the body so that every part of your child's body is included. This includes their skull, chest, spine, pelvis, arms, legs, hands and feet. The survey examines the bones to determine if there is a bony injury.

If your child is younger than 1 year, a brain CT scan will also be performed. If your child is over 1 year, a brain CT scan will only be performed if the doctor decides it is necessary due to your child's condition. The paediatrician will ask the person with parental responsibility to consent for the skeletal survey.

The skeletal survey is made up of two parts for which you will require two separate appointments, usually 11-14 days apart. It is very important that you attend **both** appointments.

The first appointment will require between 25-34 separate images to be taken and the second appointment between 13 and 17 images.

If a CT scan is required, this will be completed at the first appointment. The scan will only take 5 minutes providing your child is able to lie very still. If you are not pregnant, you may be able to stay with your child. Sometimes sedation may be used to help to keep your child still.

## **Where will the skeletal survey take place?**

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The Radiology department perform x-rays at the Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. You will be asked to attend the children's ward (Hascombe ward) first unless your child is already an inpatient.

## **Who will be doing the skeletal survey?**

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The skeletal survey will be performed by two members of x-ray staff (radiographers). You will also be accompanied by a nursing team member from the children's ward.

## **How to prepare for skeletal survey x-rays**

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Your child does not need any special preparation. It helps if your child is wearing clothes that can easily be removed, without metal fastenings.

X-rays are not painful, however your child may become distressed when they are held still for certain positions during the x-rays. Please bring a feed, dummy or toy to help settle your child if needed. Sometimes a child may be given a sedative to help them settle during the investigation if necessary.

If your child currently needs pain relief, it is best to give it prior to the x-ray.

## **What happens during a skeletal survey?**

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An appointment will be made for your child to have a skeletal survey. When it is time, you will be accompanied with your child from the children's ward to the Radiology Department. The radiographer will explain how your child needs to be positioned for each of the images to minimise any distress to both you and your child. You will need to wear a special protective apron to prevent your own exposure to x-rays. It is not unusual for a child to become distressed or grizzly during the procedure due to the need to be kept still for the images.

If you are pregnant you will not be allowed to hold your child whilst they are x-rayed to prevent any radiation dose to your unborn child; the nurse accompanying you will perform this role instead.

Once all of the imaging is complete, you will be given the date and time for your second appointment.

You and your child will then be brought back to the Children's Ward.

## **Relatives and other escorts**

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A friend or relative can accompany you to act as support. They may be allowed into the x-ray room in exceptional circumstances.

Siblings and other children will not be allowed into the x-ray room.

## **What happens after the skeletal survey?**

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A consultant radiologist (specialist x-ray doctor) will examine the images and produce a report. The images are then checked by a second radiologist. They will also produce their own report. These two reports can take up to 48 hours to compile.

The report is sent to the paediatric doctors who will tell you the results of the x-rays verbally.

The results will be shared with the multi-agency team.

This process will then be repeated when your child returns for the second part of the skeletal survey about two weeks later. You will be asked to attend the children's ward 30 minutes before this second appointment time.

## Are there any alternatives?

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No. A skeletal survey cannot be replaced with another test.

## How much radiation is there in a skeletal survey?

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We are all exposed to natural background radiation that comes from a variety of sources such as: cosmic rays, radon, some foods and from the ground.

Every X-ray gives us a small additional dose of radiation.

A skeletal survey is equivalent to a few months' background radiation.

A CT head scan is equivalent to about 18 months background radiation.

This additional exposure to radiation can slightly increase the lifetime cancer risk but the increase in risk is very small.

The examination takes place in an x-ray room using modern, digital equipment which offers very low dose imaging. The radiographers will use techniques to keep the dose as low as possible.

## Contact details and feedback

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This guide gives general information only; if you have any specific questions relating to your child's treatment, please talk to the Paediatric team.

If you would like to discuss the safeguarding service, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

## Reference source

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- <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/radiological-investigation-suspected-physical-abuse-children>

## Information on radiation

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ionising-radiation-dose-comparisons/ionising-radiation-dose-comparisons>





## Contact details

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### Safeguarding Team

**Telephone:** 01483 571122 **ext** 4251

### Hascmobe Ward

**Telephone:** 01483 571122 **ext** 4070

### Radiology Dept (X-ray)

**Telephone:** 01483 571122 **ext** 4165

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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