

Information for patients and visitors

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# Sweat Testing

**Pathology / Blood Sciences**

**Path Links**

**United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust**

**This leaflet has been designed to give you important information and to answer some common queries you may have.**



# Information for patients and visitors

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## Introduction

This fact sheet has been produced to provide information for people who need a sweat test. In addition, the leaflet explains how you can get the results of your tests and what they mean.

## What is a sweat test?

A sweat test involves the collection of sweat and the measurement of the amount of salt that is in it.

## Why does this need to be carried out?

The test is carried out on children or adults where cystic fibrosis is a possible diagnosis because they are having frequent chest infections, frequent and unexplained pale stools, problems gaining weight or growing properly or as part of a screening programme.

There are also other rarer indications for a sweat test. A positive result may mean that you or your child has cystic fibrosis (CF) but a final diagnosis will take into account other symptoms, clinical findings and test results. People with CF have a high amount of salt in their sweat.

A normal result can be helpful in ruling out CF. It is important to diagnose this condition as soon as possible in order to begin appropriate treatment.

## Who does this test?

A Biomedical Scientist from the Chemical Pathology Department will perform the test. We would like parents or legal guardians to be present if patients are under 16 years of age.

## Does the test hurt?

Some people experience a tingling sensation on the arm or leg where the sweat has been collected. No needles are involved.

## How is the test carried out?

Special gels soaked in a chemical called pilocarpine that stimulates sweat production are placed on the lower arm or leg. These are tied in place and a small electric current is passed through the gel from a battery box to further stimulate the sweating process.

The test is not painful, although a tingling sensation may occur. The gels are left in place for about 5 minutes and then removed. There should be a red mark where the pilocarpine has stimulated the skin. This is usual and should fade within a few hours.

The skin is then carefully washed with pure water and dried. A small plastic coil is placed over the stimulated area and tied. You will then be asked to wait for about 30 minutes for the sweat to be absorbed into the coil device (do not let your child tamper with the collection coil once in place).

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Your child can play as usual during the 30-minute period. The coil is then removed and taken to the laboratory for analysis.

### **The results**

Most tests are normal, as cystic fibrosis is an uncommon disease and most cases are picked up shortly after birth.

In most cases the results will clearly show either a high (abnormal) or normal salt level in the sweat but sometimes the results can be borderline and the test will need to be repeated. In a few cases the test may need to be repeated for technical reasons such as not enough sweat has been collected. Many doctors like to confirm an abnormal sweat test with a second sweat test.

### **How long will it take to get results?**

The sweat is usually analysed on the day of collection and results will then be promptly sent to the relevant Consultant / Doctor – see below.

### **Who will inform me of the results?**

Most tests are normal and the result is sent to you and your GP by letter. If the test is borderline or abnormal, your child will be recalled within a few days for a repeat test and further discussions.

### **Further questions**

If you have questions about the process of doing the sweat test, please contact the Paediatric Department or your Biochemistry Department at your local Hospital.

If you have further questions regarding the need for a sweat test in yourself or your child, please speak to the doctor who has referred you for this test as they can give you further information.

### **Benefits**

The benefit of doing the test is that it will provide your doctor with important results which will help with diagnosis and / or treatment.

### **Risks**

Some people experience a tingling sensation on the arm or leg where the sweat has been collected and a small red patch might appear on the skin. This will fade very quickly. While the system used within the hospital trust is superior to previous methods, burns during sweat stimulation have not been totally eliminated. The manufacturers have estimated a frequency of 1 burn in 50,000 procedures.

### **Alternatives**



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There are no alternative tests that could be used to the one that you have been asked to undertake.

### Contact details for Further Information

If you have any queries please ring your local laboratory:

**Boston** Tel. 01205 446386 Reception 0900-1730 (Mon-Fri)

**Grantham** Tel. 01476 565232 Ext 4706 Reception 0830-1700 (Mon-Fri)

**Lincoln** Tel. 01522 573754 Reception 0800-1700 (Mon-Fri)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service offers confidential advice, support and information on any health related matters.

If you have a comment, concern, complaint or compliment about the care or service you have received from the Trust you can contact the PALS team as follows:

#### For Pilgrim Hospital

You can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01205) 446243 or at the PALS office which is located in the main entrance.

#### For Grantham Hospital

You can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01476) 464861 or at the PALS office which situated adjacent to Ward 6.

#### For Lincoln County Hospital

You can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01522) 707071 or at the PALS office which is located near Main Reception.

Alternatively you can email:

[nlg-tr.PALS@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:nlg-tr.PALS@ulh.nhs.uk)

**Please note: PALS should not be contacted for clinical advice relating to the content of this leaflet. The service should be contacted directly in the first instance.**

### Confidentiality and How We Use Data

Personal information on NHS patients is collected and recorded within paper and electronic formats primarily to support high quality care that is safe and effective. To do this, information is also used to support quality improvement activities, investigate any concerns you may raise as well as to support and understand NHS performance. All NHS staff have a legal duty to keep information about you confidential.

Information will only ever be shared with people who have a genuine need for it. Other circumstances where information may be shared include administrative teams to plan future



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care needed, commissioners of Trust services, other NHS or social care providers and in some cases voluntary sector providers.

### **Zero Tolerance - Violent, Threatening and Abusive Behaviour**

The Trust and its staff are committed to providing high quality care to patients within the department. However, we wish to advise all patients / visitors that the following inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated:

- Swearing
- Threatening / abusive behaviour
- Verbal / physical abuse

The Trust reserves the right to withdraw from treating patients who are threatening / abusive / violent and ensuring the removal of those persons from the premises.

All acts of criminal violence and aggression will be notified to the Police immediately.

### **Risk Management Strategy**

The Trust welcomes comments and suggestions from patients and visitors that could help to reduce risk.

Perhaps you have experienced something whilst in hospital, whilst attending as an outpatient or as a visitor and you felt at risk.

Please tell a member of staff on the ward or in the department you are attending / visiting.

### **Moving & Handling**

The Trust operates a Minimal Lifting Policy, which in essence means patients are only ever lifted by nursing staff in an emergency situation.

Patients are always encouraged to help themselves as much as possible when mobilising, and if unable to do so, equipment may be used to assist in their safe transfer.

If you have any questions regarding moving and handling of patients within the Trust, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department you are visiting.

### **United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust**

**Pilgrim Hospital**  
**Sibsey Road**  
**Boston**  
**PE21 9QS**  
**01205 364801**

**Grantham & District Hospital**  
**101 Manthorpe Road**  
**Grantham**



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NG31 8DG  
01476 464706

Lincoln County Hospital  
Greetwell Road  
Lincoln  
LN2 5QY  
01522 512512

[www.ulh.nhs.uk](http://www.ulh.nhs.uk)

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