



# What is a short-term Central Venous Catheter (CVC)?

## Information for patients who are going to have a short-term central venous catheter

### What is a short-term Central Venous Catheter?

A short-term central venous catheter (CVC) is a fine, plastic tube that is positioned into a large vein in your chest. The CVC is normally inserted at a point on your neck or on the chest below your collar bone. It normally stays in place for up to 4 weeks and is used for patients who are being looked after in an acute hospital. An experienced doctor from the hospital will insert your short-term central venous catheter. This may be done in the ward or unit where you are being looked after, or in the operating theatre.

### The benefits of a short-term Central Venous Catheter:

- CVC's allow fast and reliable access for intravenous injections and infusions, transfusions and for taking blood tests
- They are probably more comfortable than frequent blood tests and cannulas
- They are occasionally essential for the administration of certain medicines
- They can stay in place for up to 4 weeks

### Are there risks of having a short-term Central Venous Catheter?

**Bleeding:** There may be bruising or significant bleeding. Your doctor may need to prescribe a platelet transfusion or other medicine before the procedure to help your blood clot if this is a problem

**Pneumothorax (collapsed lung):** Rarely, the lining of one of your lungs is punctured during the procedure. This often resolves spontaneously but may occasionally require insertion of a second tube (a 'chest drain') to re-expand the lung

**Infections:** The risk is reduced by keeping the line scrupulously clean. Infections will require intravenous antibiotics, usually in hospital, and the line may have to be removed

**Blocked line:** It may just be difficult to remove blood, or it may also be difficult to give medication through the line. It is essential the line is regularly flushed to avoid this

**Rupture:** This is very rare but may occur if the line is 'forced' or gets pinched between collarbone and rib

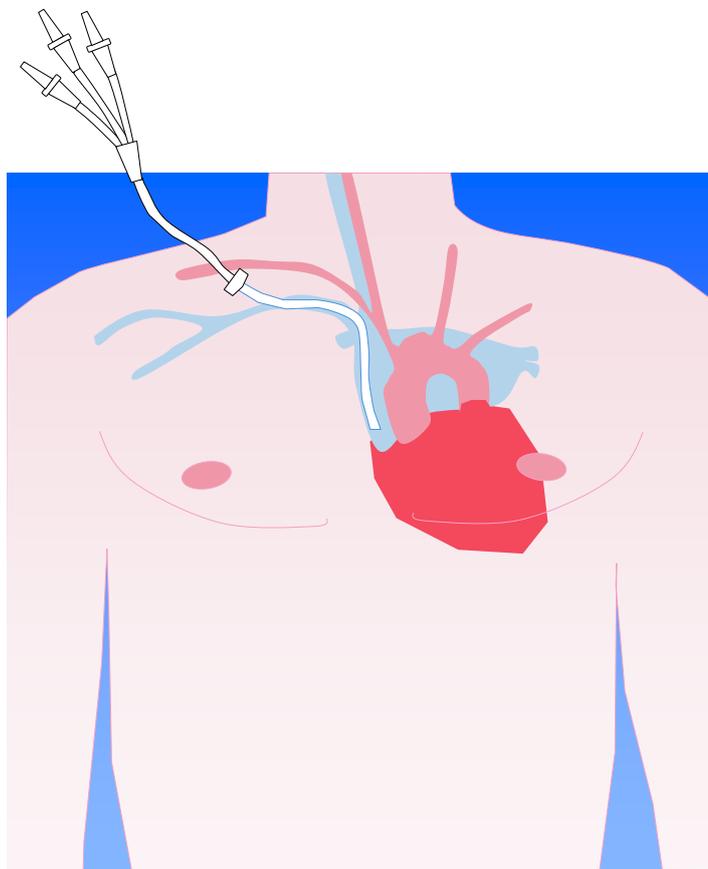
**Cardiac arrhythmias:** If the short-term central venous catheter is inserted too far, it could cause your heart to beat faster than usual causing you to feel palpitations (a fluttery feeling). If this occurs, the line will be withdrawn slightly or removed after which the symptoms should stop

## How is the short-term Central Venous Catheter inserted?

The doctor will explain the procedure to you and, if you are well enough, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions. You may be asked to sign a consent form if you agree to the procedure.

You will need to lie on a bed/couch for the procedure. The doctor will prepare the equipment, wash his/her hands and put on a surgical gown and gloves. This is to minimise the risk of bacteria being spread during the procedure.

The doctor will clean the skin on your neck and/or chest and then inject some local anaesthetic. The doctor will then insert a needle and cannula into a large vein in your neck/chest area and then carefully thread the CVC through the cannula into the vein. Once the short-term central venous catheter has been inserted, it will be stitched in place and a dressing will be applied to the skin.



What your short term central venous catheter will look like

## After the short-term central venous catheter has been inserted

You will need to be careful not to dislodge the short-term central venous catheter once it has been inserted. The dressing will be changed by the nurses on the ward, initially after 24-48 hours and thereafter each week, unless it requires more frequent changes.

## Removal of the short-term central venous catheter

When the short-term central venous catheter is no longer needed for your treatment, it can be removed. You will need to lie on the bed with your head tilted downwards for this. The nurse or doctor will wash their hands and put sterile gloves on. He/she will then hold the line and gently yet steadily pull the line out. You will be asked to take a deep breath in and then gently let the breath out as the line is being removed. The nurse or doctor will then press on the area where the short-term central venous catheter was for about 5 minutes to prevent bleeding. A sterile dressing will be applied to the area. You are advised to keep the area dry for 24 hours in case of bleeding.

## Who to contact

If you have a problem or concern about any aspect of your short-term central line, please contact a member of the hospital team looking after you.

They can be contacted on the number below:

Name: ..... Telephone: .....

## About this leaflet

Author: Abigail Orchard, Lead Cancer Nurse  
Written: March 2015  
Updated And Approved: March 2020  
Review Date: March 2023  
Edition: 2

If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email [pals@dchft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@dchft.nhs.uk)



**INTEGRITY | RESPECT | TEAMWORK | EXCELLENCE**

© 2020 Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust  
Williams Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2JY  
[www.dchft.nhs.uk](http://www.dchft.nhs.uk)