**Learn about your IV Line (Drip)**

**What is an IV cannula (tube)?**

An IV cannula is a small plastic tube that passes through your skin into a vein. We will refer to it as a tube in this leaflet. It is often called an IV line or a drip. A needle is used to put the tube in through the skin. After the tube is in place the nurse or doctor takes away the needle and leaves the tube in place. There is a cap or lid on the end of the tube outside the body.

The tube can be used to give you fluids or blood or medicines and some can be used to take blood samples. The tube means that you do not need to have a needle jab every time you get a medicine that is given into the vein. Usually the tube goes through the skin into one of the arm veins.

Sometimes the tube goes through the skin on the chest wall or the neck and into one of the big veins inside the chest. A tube that goes into one of the big veins in the neck is called a central venous catheter or central line. It can be uncomfortable when one of these tubes is being put in place but after that is done most have no trouble from it.

**What can go wrong with an IV cannula (tube)?**

The tube leaves a small hole in your skin and it sits in that hole with one end outside on the skin and the other end inside your vein. As long as there is a tube in place and a little hole in the skin there is a risk that bacteria (bugs) can track along the tube to get under your skin or into your vein. If this happens you can get an infection.

**Infection from an IV cannula (tube)**

Infection is sometimes just at the place where the tube is placed. This local infection can cause soreness or pain near the tube and the skin may get red and hot. Sometimes there is crusting or small scabs at the place where the tube goes through the skin. If you notice any of these things tell your nurse or doctor right away.

Infection from an IV cannula (tube) can sometimes be very serious with spread of bacteria into the blood (septicaemia). When this happens the person usually feels very sick and may have shivering, temperature and feel very weak. If this happens to you tell your nurse or doctor right away

**What can be done to protect you from IV cannula (tube) infection?**

Even with the best care that is possible there is always a risk of infection with an IV cannula (tube). The risk is higher in people with very complicated illness, people who are very vulnerable to infection and in people where is very hard to put in the tube because their veins are hard to find.

The most important thing to reduce the risk of infection is that people should only get a tube put in if they need one. The tube should be taken out as soon as it is no longer needed. If you have an IV tube it is OK to ask every day if you still need it.

The risk of infection from the tube is less when the skin is cleaned carefully before the needle is put through the skin. Risk of infection is less if the doctor or nurse putting in the cannula is careful about cleaning their hands before they put it in. It is OK to remind people to clean their hands.

The risk of getting and infection from an IV cannula (tube) is less if everyone carries out hand hygiene before they touch the tube or give you medicines through it. It is OK to remind people to clean their hands.

Watch out for and tell nurses and doctors if you get

* soreness or pain near the tube
* the skin near the tube gets red and hot
* there is crusting or small scabs at the place where the tube is placed
* there is pus at the place where the tube is placed
* the tube is still in but no one has used it for a day
* you get shivering or a high temperature or feel suddenly very unwell

**Further information**

Please do not hesitate to ask the healthcare staff caring for you if you have any questions, or if you require more information about IV cannula (tube). Information on hand hygiene, infection control and managing superbugs at home is available on [www.hse.ie/infectioncontrol](http://www.hse.ie/infectioncontrol) or on [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

**This information is approved for use by the HSE’s Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control national programme. Text awarded Plain English mark from the National Adult Literacy Agency**

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