

IV cannula (drip)



Watch out for and tell nurses and doctors if you get:

- soreness or pain near the IV cannula/tube
- the skin near the IV cannula/tube gets red and hot
- there is crusting or small scabs at the place where the IV cannula/tube is placed
- there is pus at the place where the IV cannula/tube is placed
- the IV cannula/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

If you have any questions please ask the healthcare staff caring for you. If you require more information about IV cannula/tube check www.hse.ie/hcai or on www.hpsc.ie



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Version 2, September 2023

HSE stock code HNC01212



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What is an IV cannula (tube)?

An IV cannula is a small plastic tube that passes through your skin into a vein. Usually the tube goes through the skin into one of the arm veins.

We will refer to it as an IV cannula /tube in this leaflet. It is often called an IV line or a drip. A needle is in the tube to help get this tube through your skin and into your vein. After the tube is in place, the nurse or doctor takes away the needle. There is a cap or lid on the end of the tube outside the body.

The tube that is left in place is used to give you fluids, or blood or medicines. The tube means that you do not need to have an injection or needle every time you get medicine into the vein.

What is a central venous catheter (CVC)?

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 the IV cannula/tubes is being put in place but after that is done; most people have no trouble from it.

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

Sometimes it may be difficult to insert an IV cannula/tube. This may result in more than one attempt.

The insertion of an IV cannula/tube into a vein can lead to some bruising or bleeding where the needle goes in. The amount of bruising or bleeding may be affected by your medical condition or by the drugs you are taking.

Your IV cannula/tube may become blocked; this will prevent it from being used. If it cannot be unblocked it may need to be replaced. Some patients might have pain and redness along the length of the vein in which the cannula sits: this is called phlebitis. If this happens to you, your IV cannula/tube will need to be removed.

The IV cannula/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 there is a tube in place in the skin, there is a risk that bacteria (bugs) can move up the IV cannula/tube to get under your skin or into your vein. If this happens, you can get an infection.

Infection from an IV cannula (tube/drip)

Infection is sometimes just at the place where the tube is placed. This local infection can cause soreness or pain near the IV cannula/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. When this happens the person usually feels very sick and may have shivering, a 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 possible, there is always a risk of infection with an IV cannula/tube. The risk is higher in people:

- with a very complicated illness,
- who are very vulnerable to infection
- where it is very hard to put in the tube because veins are hard to find.

The tube should be taken out as soon as it is no longer needed. If you have an IV cannula/tube, it is OK to ask every day if you still need it.

The risk of infection from the IV cannula/tube is reduced 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 IV cannula/tube is careful about cleaning their hands before they put it in. It is OK to remind people to clean their hands. It is important not to touch or interfere with the IV cannula/tube

