

Having an X-ray



Information for patients

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals



What is an X-ray?

X-rays are a type of radiation. They are similar to visible light but with some important differences. The key difference is that X-rays can pass through the body and create a 'shadow-like' image of the structures it has passed through. The brightness of the shadow produced depends on the density of the area they pass through. When an X-ray cannot easily pass through an object (such as bone) the object will display as a lighter shade whilst areas with a lower density (such as a lung) will display as a darker shade.

Is an X-ray examination dangerous?

X-rays are regarded as generally safe. The dose of radiation that you will receive is roughly the same as you would receive from the general environment over about a week, or from taking a long-distance, international plane flight.

Why do I need an X-ray?

You will have recently seen your doctor about a medical problem. Your doctor may make the decision that an X-ray examination would be beneficial in aiding your diagnosis. The doctor that refers you for the X-ray should follow national guidelines which recommend specific X-ray examinations for specific problems to avoid unnecessary exposures to radiation.

Is there anything I need to do to prepare?

There is no preparation for these types of X-rays, however we ask that you try to avoid any metallic objects around the area to be X-rayed. Please remove and keep any jewellery safe as we cannot look after your jewellery for you.

Who will perform my X-ray?

Your X-ray will be carried out in a hospital by a trained specialist called a radiographer. Radiographers are trained to ensure that the amount of radiation used for a medical exposure is kept as low as possible and ensure all requests for X-rays are in your best interest in line with current guidelines.

What will happen when I arrive?

When you arrive at the X-ray department you will book in at the reception desk and take a seat. When it is time for your examination you will be taken into the X-ray room or may be asked to get changed. If you are asked to get changed into one of our patient gowns, it is usually because the area being imaged may be obscured by your normal clothing, which may lead to the image needing to be repeated.

When you enter the X-ray room you will be greeted by a radiographer who will be performing the X-ray.

The radiographer will ask you to confirm your name and date of birth and the area that you are expecting to be X-rayed, this is for your own safety.

What will happen after I have had an X-ray?

Once your X-ray has been taken you will be able to leave. Your X-ray will be looked at by a specialised X-ray doctor called a radiologist and a report will be sent to your doctor, usually within 1 – 2 weeks.

Is there any chance you could be pregnant?

If there is any chance you may be pregnant, tell the radiographer who is doing the X-ray. While the majority of medical X-rays do not pose a serious risk to a developing baby, they are not usually recommended for pregnant women, except in an emergency.



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