

What is Priapism?

Priapism is a prolonged and painful erection of the penis that happens or continues without sexual arousal. Patients with sickling disorders (particularly HbSS) are more prone to this condition. Your child may suffer from priapism.

Sickling of red blood cells within the penis interferes with blood flow back to the body resulting in inflammation and a build-up of pressure. Very prolonged episodes of priapism may lead to later problems in getting an erection (erectile dysfunction). Prompt treatment of severe episodes is very important to prevent this.

What are the types of Priapism?

Stuttering

- Shorter episodes lasting for a few minutes up to three hours are described as stuttering priapism. This type of priapism can occur frequently. Although the shorter episodes are less serious, there is a risk your child may have a fulminant episode so you should always tell your Haematologist if stuttering priapism is happening.
- Patients with frequent episodes may be given medicines to control this.

Fulminant

- This is when an episode of priapism lasts **over three hours**. This is an emergency and if not treated promptly, permanent damage to the penis can occur.

What triggers Priapism?

Fatigue, cold, dehydration and infection all increase the chances of priapism. Priapism can occur along with a painful crisis.

What can I do to prevent it happening?

- Your child must maintain a good fluid intake.
- Your child should empty his bladder before going to bed at night.
- Try to ensure your child gets enough sleep.
- Alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs like marijuana and cocaine can all cause priapism.
- Use of sildenafil (also known as Viagra) can also increase the risk. Please discuss with your haematologist if your child has been prescribed this medication.
- If your child suffers from priapism tell your doctor before starting new medicines.

What do I do when my child has Priapism?

- Your child should take their usual pain relief medication
- Your child should try and empty their bladder
- Your child should increase their fluid intake
- Gentle exercise e.g. walking
- Sometimes a warm bath or shower may help

Do not apply ice or use cold water, this may make the priapism worse

If you have tried the above measures without success or the **priapism has been present for more than two hours**, your child must either attend their Haematology Unit for urgent assessment (see local contacts below for details) or nearest Accident and Emergency Department

Don't forget?

- Priapism is a common problem for people with sickle cell disease.
- Your child must not feel embarrassed or ashamed if this happens to him.
- It is very important for your Haematologist to know if your child suffers from priapism; if you or your child is asked about this, it is important to give an accurate answer so he can be properly treated.
- Do not be afraid to ask them for advice if you have any concerns.

Local Contact Information

Consultant

Specialist registrar

Accident & Emergency Department



SPA

SCOTTISH PAEDIATRIC AND ADULT HAEMOGLOBINOPATHIES NETWORK



**Information about Priapism in
Sickle Cell Disease
for the Parent / Carer**