



Name of Child: _____ Date: _____

How to Care for a Port-a-Cath

Why does my child need a Port-a-Cath?

When a child is diagnosed with a serious condition, parents often feel out of control because they don't understand everything that is happening. However, once they learn about the illness and master home care skills, parents get their sense of control back.

Perhaps you, too, are feeling out of control and overwhelmed because you need to learn about Port-a-Cath (**Port**) care. This information may seem like too much to handle right now, but don't give up. Like other families, you will also be able to take care of your child's Port-a-Cath.

Your child's doctor and surgeon decide if a Port-a-Cath is right for your child. They will discuss their thoughts with you and your child.

Why is a Port-a-Cath necessary? Some children with medical problems need frequent IV (**intravenous**) treatments. To avoid all those needle sticks, the doctor may decide to insert a Port-a-Cath.

Port-a-Caths may be used to give IV medicines, blood transfusions, fluids, and nourishment, or draw blood samples. A Port-a-Cath may also make it possible to do some of these things at home.

Many families find that the Port-a-Cath helps make their child's medical treatment a little easier. Your child's nurses will review this with you. They will answer your questions. If you have any questions, ask the members of your child's health care team.

Putting in the Port-a-Cath

A child with a Port-a-Cath avoids some painful IV pokes. Fewer pokes can mean fewer breaks in the skin for germs to enter, so less chance of infection.

The Port-a-Cath is a safe way to keep tubing (a catheter) in a large vein. This way, whenever you have to get medicines, blood transfusions, fluids, or nourishment in, or take blood samples out, you don't have to start an IV (intravenous catheter).

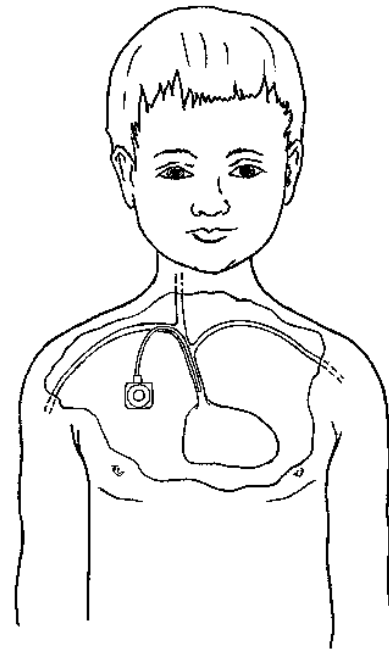
The Port-a-Cath is placed in the child under general or local anesthesia in the operating room by the surgeon. The Port-a-Cath is not painful to the child when it is in place. When the Port-a-Cath is in, you cannot see it. You just see a small lump, like a bottle cap under the skin.

The main part of the Port-a-Cath is called the port or reservoir. It may be made of stainless steel, titanium, or plastic. The surgeon puts it in, under the skin, usually in the upper chest.

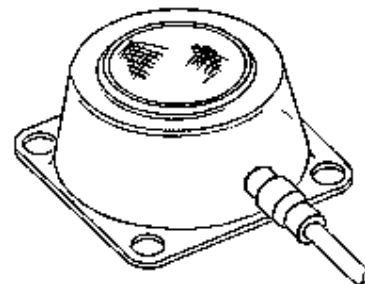
The port is connected to a tube (catheter). The surgeon threads this tube through a large vein. A large vein can handle medicines and fluids which may bother a small vein.

An x-ray is taken after the surgery to make sure that the catheter is in the right position. The skin over the Port-a-Cath will be covered with gauze or small pieces of tape (Steri-Strips). There may be a little blood draining from the spot.

For a day or two after the Port-a-Cath is put in, your child may feel a bit sore or uncomfortable. You may give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) to treat the soreness.



When the Port-a-Cath is in, you cannot see it. You just see a small lump, like a bottle cap under the skin.



The port or reservoir may be made of stainless steel, titanium, or plastic.

The Port-a-Cath can stay in place a long time. However, each child is different. The doctor will decide how long the catheter must stay in place.

Until you, your family, and your child get used to the Port-a-Cath, talk about how you feel about it.

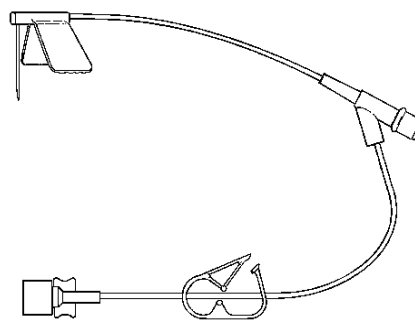
Using the Port-A-Cath

To use a Port-a-Cath to put fluids in or take blood samples out, it needs to be accessed. The Port-a-Cath is accessed through a special needle that comes bent at a 90-degree angle. Only nurses, doctors, and families with special training can put this needle in the port.

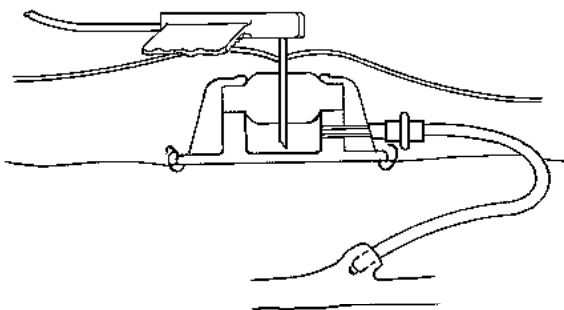
One to three hours before the needle is put in, the skin over the Port-a-Cath is usually numbed with EMLA cream.

To learn more about this cream, ask your nurse or doctor for the handout: **EMLA Cream: Making Needle Sticks Easier (157)** (Check when done.)

When the skin is numb, the nurse or doctor cleans the skin off with alcohol and a brown medicine that kills germs, called Betadine. The nurse or doctor puts the needle in the port. Your child will feel the needle being put in, and will feel mild pressure on the port. The needle needs to be changed every seven days, or as your doctor orders.



The Port-a-Cath is accessed through a special needle that comes bent at a 90-degree angle.



A nurse or doctor with special training puts the needle in the port.

Caring for your child's Port-a-Cath

Since your child's Port-a-Cath is under the skin, there is very little you need to do to take care of it. After the skin over the port is healed, your child may return to normal activities, including swimming. Before you let your child play any contact sports, ask your child's surgeon if it is OK.

After the incision heals, the surgeon will tell you when gauze or tape can be taken off, and you can get the skin wet. A dressing is only put over the port when a needle is in it.

When there is no needle in the Port-a-Cath, you may wash the skin as usual. Look at the skin over the Port-a-Cath every day.



After the skin over the port is healed, your child may return to normal activities.



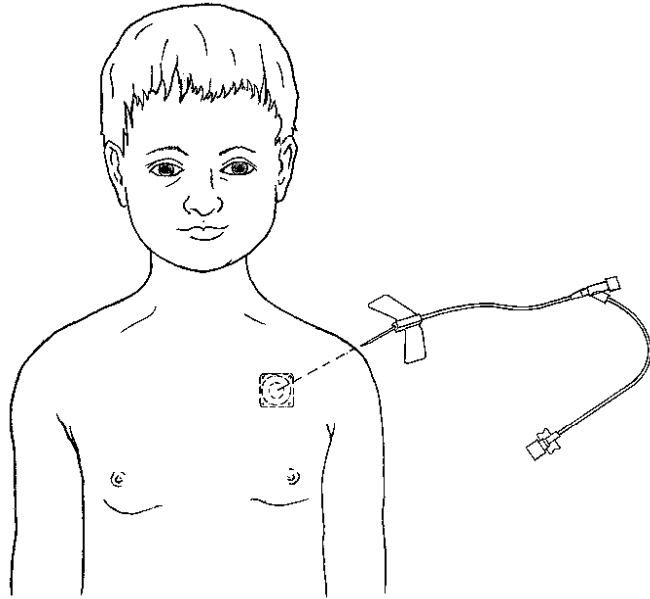
Call your child's doctor right away if the site around the Port-a-Cath has:

- bruising
 - swelling
 - redness
 - bleeding
 - pain
- or if your child:**
- has a fever over 101° F.
 - has chills
 - the port seems to have moved

The port can go without being used for 30 days. When it is not being used, it needs to be flushed every 30 days with a medicine (heparin) that prevents the blood

from clotting inside the port. If a blood clot forms in the tube, it should not be used.

So, ask your nurse or doctor how you will get the port flushed when the port is not being used. You may need to bring your child to the clinic, or your doctor may ask a home health nurse to flush it. You cannot do this yourself, unless you have special training to access the port.



The needle needs to be changed every seven days, or as your doctor orders.

Now that you've read this:

- Tell your nurse or doctor what the medicine heparin is for, and when your child's Port-a-Cath needs it. (Check when done.)
- Tell your nurse or doctor what you will look for at the site where the Port-a-Cath is placed. (Check when done.)



If you have any questions or concerns,

- call your child's doctor or call _____

If you want to know more about child health and illness,
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016
602-546-1400
www.phoenixchildrenshospital.com

Disclaimer

The information provided at this site is intended to be general information, and is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of examination, treatment, or consultation with a physician. Phoenix Children's Hospital urges you to contact your physician with any questions you may have about a medical condition.

Tuesday, October 31, 2006 • DRAFT to family review
#306 • Written by Joe Caracci, RN • Illustrated by Dennis Swain



Name of Health Care Provider: _____ Number: 306
For office use: Date returned: _____ db nb

Family Review of Handout

Health care providers: Please teach families with this handout.

Families: Please let us know what you think of this handout.

Would you say this handout is hard to read? Yes No

easy to read? Yes No

Please circle the parts of the handout that were hard to understand.

Would you say this handout is interesting to read? Yes No

Why or why not?

Would you do anything differently after reading
this handout? Yes No

If yes, what?

After reading this handout, do you have any
questions about the subject? Yes No

If yes, what?

Is there anything you don't like about the drawings?

Yes No

If yes, what?

What changes would you make in this handout to make it better or easier to understand?

Please return your review of this handout to your nurse or doctor or send it to the address below.

Fran London, MS, RN
Health Education Specialist
The Emily Center
Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7710

602-546-1395

flondon@phoenixchildrens.com

Thank you for helping us!