

Why routine patient contact shielding is no longer needed

What is patient contact shielding?

Patient contact shielding involves placing a protective layer or barrier, usually made of lead or similar material, over parts of your or your child's body that are not being imaged during X ray examinations such as radiography, fluoroscopy or computed tomography.

In recent years our understanding of the use of routine patient contact shielding has changed.

What we now know

- X ray equipment has improved, dramatically reducing the amount of radiation being delivered during X ray examinations.
- Incorrect or unintended placement of shielding in relation to the body part being imaged can obscure important details, leading to repeated examinations.
- Shielding materials can also interfere with the automatic dose control of the equipment, increasing the dose and reducing image quality, and might lead to a need for repeat examination.
- Shielding parts of the body not being imaged does not impact the very low doses of radiation that have already entered and scattered within the body during the imaging.
- Reusing the same shields can lead to hygiene problems.



For these reasons, routine patient contact shielding is no longer recommended. Staff take many other measures to limit your or your child's radiation dose.

Can there be exceptions?

Staff may still provide shielding to cover parts of the body that are outside the area that needs to be evaluated, in certain situations or upon request. It can be helpful to discuss such exceptions with the staff.

What if I'm pregnant?

Sometimes X ray examinations are deemed medically necessary during pregnancy. In such cases, staff will take additional precautions and will assess whether shielding is necessary or not.

The essential first step is to inform the staff if you are pregnant or might be pregnant before the examination, so they can take any additional precautions. This may include considering delaying procedures or taking other measures to keep any X ray dose to the unborn child as low as possible.



Why do I have to wear a shield while my child is being X rayed?



The X ray examination prescribed by your doctor is to help diagnose and treat your child. Even though the exposure to others in the area is very, very low, regulations very often require that anyone who is not being examined wears shields such as a lead apron.

Why do staff still wear aprons?

Since staff are regularly exposed to radiation as part of their job and not for their own medical benefit, it is important for them to minimise their X ray dose. That is why you will still see them wearing protective aprons.



Still have concerns?

Ask medical staff what measures will be taken to reduce your or your child's radiation dose and if shielding can be applied.

