Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Water Soluble Contrast Enema

Version number: **4**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

Water Soluble Contrast Enema

Patient Information

X-Ray Department

- Author ID: SJO
- Leaflet Ref: Rad 028
- Version: 4
- Leaflet title: Water Soluble Contrast Enema
- Date Produced: February 2026
- Expiry Date: February 2028

Introduction

You have been referred by your doctor for a water-soluble enema examination. This is an x-ray examination used to visualise the large bowel using contrast (x-ray dye).

This information leaflet has been produced to give you general information and hopes to answer most of your questions when requiring a water-soluble contrast enema. It is not intended to replace the discussion between you and the Healthcare Team but may act as a starting point for discussion. If after reading it you have concerns or require further explanation, please discuss this with a member of the Healthcare Team.

Important Information

Are you, or might you be pregnant?

If either of the following applies to you, please contact the X-ray Department before the day of your procedure:

- To prevent x-raying an unborn baby, we will only perform this examination on women within 28 days of the first day of their last period (this only applies to women aged between 12 and 55 years old).
- If it is longer than 28 days between your appointment and the first day of a period, please ring the x-ray department for advice: 01942 822398.

What will happen during the procedure?

The procedure is carried out as a day case, and you **DO NOT** need to be admitted to hospital for the procedure.

Bowel preparation is **NOT** needed for this examination, and you can eat and drink normally beforehand. If you have a stoma (opening onto the surface of the abdomen), please bring spare stoma bags with you just in case they are needed after the examination.

You should arrive at the Radiology Department about 5 minutes before the appointment time on your letter and book in at the x-ray reception desk.

You will be shown into a private changing cubicle and asked to undress and put a hospital gown on. You will be able to place your personal items in a basket which you will keep with you. You may bring your own dressing gown to wear over the top.

Upon entering the X-ray Room, the Enhanced Practitioner Radiographer and/or Radiologist will greet you. They will check your personal details and discuss the procedure with you. You will need to give your verbal consent before starting the examination.

You will be awake during the procedure and there will always be a member of staff nearby to support you.

You will be asked to lie on your left side on the x-ray table, and the Radiologist or Advanced Practitioner Radiographer will place a small, soft, plastic tube into your bottom. Contrast (x-ray dye) will be passed through the tube and this will fill your bowel. You will be asked to move into various positions so the contrast can coat the inside of the bowel.

Once the contrast enters your bowel, we will start taking x-rays; this will involve you lying on your side, back, or tummy to get the best images possible. During the procedure, you need to do your best to keep as much contrast in your bowel as possible but do not worry if some of the contrast leaks out.

Air is also used to inflate your bowel during the procedure. There is a chance that your stoma bag could overfill and become loose or burst due to the pressure. Please ensure that you have plenty of spare bags available.

The contrast will let the doctor/Radiographer see the bowel on the x-rays. The x-rays taken are used to help diagnose various diseases or to check the bowel following surgery.

Every patient is different; however, the procedure usually takes approximately half an hour.

At the end of the examination, most of the contrast will be drained out of your bowel through the tube which was placed at the beginning of the procedure, although some of it will stay within your bowel.

Once the examination is finished, you will be shown to a private toilet outside the X-ray Room. It is possible for the dye to leak out of your back passage and may also collect in the stoma bag if you have one. You will be able to expel most of the remaining contrast before you leave the department.

You are free to leave the department whenever you feel you are finished and dressed.

You will be able to continue to eat and drink as normal.

The results will be sent to the doctor who sent you for the test and they will arrange to give you the results.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

This procedure is needed to diagnose a range of bowel problems quickly and accurately:

- To assess your bowel for diseases
- To assess your bowel for narrowing
- To check your bowel for leaks after surgery

What are the risks of this procedure?

A water-soluble contrast enema is a safe examination; however, as with any examination, there are small risks, but these are extremely rare. There is a very rare risk that a small tear could be made in the wall of the bowel. The practitioner will take great care to avoid this happening, and these small risks are very much outweighed by the benefit of the examination. If this did happen, it would usually resolve itself, but if you need any immediate attention, this would be arranged. The doctor who referred you would be informed.

Radiation – is it safe?

X-rays are used to produce images in this procedure. X-rays are a type of radiation. We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day; this comes from the sun, the food we eat, and the ground. Being exposed to X-rays carries a small risk, but your doctor feels that this risk is outweighed by the benefits of having this procedure. We take all appropriate precautions to minimise the number of X-rays you receive.

What happens if I decide not to have the procedure?

You will be referred back to your consultant to discuss this further.

What if I have any special requirements?

If you have any special needs or requirements, please contact the X-ray Department on 01942 822398.

Where can I park my car?

You can park your car on the main hospital site and there is a charge, so bring some change with you. Additional car park is available to patients on Freckleton Street, and this is a short walk up to the hospital. The same parking charges apply.

Ambulance Transport

If you live in the Borough of Wigan and it is necessary for you to have ambulance transport, please telephone 0300 707 0737 to arrange this. Please inform the ambulance depot when booking that it is for a special X-Ray, and it is essential that you arrive on time.

If you do not live in the Wigan borough, please contact your General Practitioner (GP) to arrange your ambulance transport.

Further Information

If you have any queries regarding your examination, or suggestions on how we may improve any aspect of our service, please do not hesitate to speak to us either on the day of the examination or contact us on 01942 822398 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.



Version number: **4**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

All rights reserved © 2026
WWL Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust