



## Clinical Guidelines

# Acute Neurosurgical Emergency Transfer [see also CATS SOP neurosurgical]

### Document Control Information

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## 1. Assessment

### TIME IS BRAIN

#### **An acute neurosurgical emergency is time-critical.**

This usually means that the patient must reach a neurosurgical centre for *urgent surgery without delay*, as soon as possible, and certainly within 4 hours of injury.

**In order to achieve speedy transfer, the transfer to a neurosurgical centre will usually need to be undertaken by the referring hospital team**

### **Urgent conference call between receiving neurosurgeon and CATS**

For these reasons, early identification and appropriate management of an acute neurosurgical emergency is crucial.

A CT scan will usually help in identifying such situations. However, it is important to clinically consider the possibility of a neurosurgical emergency even before the CT scan is performed.

**Useful pointers** (but not a comprehensive list):

#### **Following trauma**

- A. Rapid loss of consciousness
- B. Initial lucid interval followed by rapid loss of consciousness
- C. Unequal pupils
- D. Cushing's triad: hypertension, bradycardia and abnormal respiration
- E. Focal neurological deficit e.g. hemiparesis
- F. Obvious external injury e.g. depressed skull fracture

#### **Non-traumatic**

- A. Suspected VP shunt block
- B. Rapid loss of consciousness in previously well patient
- C. Unexplained cardio-respiratory arrest in young infant
- D. Focal neurological deficit, including focal seizures in an older child
- E. Antecedent severe headache + vomiting

## 2. Initial management

Initial management should be in accordance with APLS/ATLS guidelines:

- 2.1 Stabilise airway and cervical spine, breathing and circulation (ABC) as a priority. These take precedence over other injuries. **Hypotension and hypoxaemia are strongly associated with poor outcome.**
- 2.2 Establish 2 points of intravenous access (consider intraosseus if difficult).
- 2.3 Pass urinary catheter and orogastric tube
- 2.4 Consider NAI, especially in children < 2 years of age.

## 3. Indications for intubation

- GCS of  $\leq 8$  or rapid decrease in GCS
- Signs of raised ICP: pupillary asymmetry, Cushing's triad
- Loss of airway reflexes
- Ventilatory insufficiency
- Spontaneous hyperventilation ( $\text{PaCO}_2 \leq 3.5$ )

## 4. Management following intubation

- 4.1 Continue complete in-line cervical immobilization with well-fitting collar, sandbags and tape (this is a visual reminder regarding C spine clearance).
- 4.2 Secure airway with Melbourne strapping or tape. Ensure equal air entry.
- 4.3 Sedate and paralyse adequately with morphine, midazolam and vecuronium infusions.
- 4.4 Ventilate to a normal  $\text{PaCO}_2$  (4.7 – 5.3 kPa), with mandatory  $\text{ETCO}_2$  monitoring.
- 4.5 Aim for saturations of  $\geq 94\%$ .
- 4.6 Maintain MAP to maintain CPP, use dopamine or noradrenaline.

Age	Mean Arterial Pressure (MAP)
<2 yrs	>60 mmHg
2-6 yrs	>70 mmHg
>6 yrs	>80 mmHg

- 4.7 Consider mannitol (0.25 to 0.5 g/kg = 1.25 – 2.5 ml/kg of 20% solution) and/or 3% NaCl (3 ml/kg over 20 minutes, aim for serum Na 145) if concerns about raised ICP or rapid

changes in clinical signs (e.g. pupillary changes). Discuss with CATS consultant and neurosurgical team.

4.8 Frequent attention to pupil size and vital signs is essential.

## 5. Transport considerations

- Decision regarding the most time effective method of transferring the patient to tertiary centre should be made in joint consultation with the CATS consultant and neurosurgical team. **National guidance suggests that for a neurosurgical emergency, transfer by the referring hospital team is the most appropriate.**
- Staff most familiar with inter-hospital transfer and capable of managing the airway should perform the transfer. This will usually be a member of the anaesthetic team from the referring hospital.
- Mandatory monitoring during transfer should include: ECG, SpO<sub>2</sub>, blood pressure (non invasive or invasive) and end tidal CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Child should be fully sedated (morphine and midazolam infusions) and muscle relaxed for the transfer.
- Fentanyl boluses (5 mcg/kg), mannitol and/or 3% saline should be available during transfer for rapid changes in ICP

**CHECKLIST TO AID TRANSFER OF NEUROSURGICAL EMERGENCIES FOR THE**  
**DISTRICT GENERAL HOSPITAL**

**Appropriate staff identified**


**Local ambulance service notified**

State ventilated neurosurgical emergency patient transfer  
Expect ASAP response time

**Essential equipment**

Airway bag (tape, face mask, T piece, ambubag, ETT, laryngoscopes, scissors)  
Drug bag (Fluid boluses, Mannitol and/or 3% saline, fentanyl)  
Ventilator and oxygen  
Infusion pumps (sedation, muscle relaxant, vasoactive infusions)


**Adequate monitoring**

ECG  
SpO<sub>2</sub>  
Blood pressure (NIBP cuff **or** arterial)  
End tidal CO<sub>2</sub>


**Physiological targets**

SpO<sub>2</sub> ≥94%  
Mean BP = age appropriate target  
End tidal CO<sub>2</sub>: 4.7-5.3 kPa  
Full sedation and paralysis


