



# A guide to...

# Suspected Pulmonary Embolism

## *Patient Information*

### How to contact us

Ambulatory Care Department  
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If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email [westherts.pals@nhs.net](mailto:westherts.pals@nhs.net)



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## **Introduction**

You have been asked to attend Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) or the Ambulatory Emergency Care (AEC) because it is suspected you may have a developing blockage in your lungs called a pulmonary embolism (PE). This leaflet gives you information about what this means and how you will be looked after.

## **What is a Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?**

A PE is a blockage of a blood vessel in your lungs. This is usually caused by blood clots that travel from the deep veins in your leg, known as Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). The blood vessels in the lungs are very small and are easily blocked when the clot becomes wedged. The clot may prevent blood travelling to that section of the lung.

## **Why do people have a PE?**

A PE can happen for a number of reasons, such as:

- periods of immobility caused by long travel journeys, illnesses or injuries
- following an operation
- pregnancy
- having severe pre-existing medical illnesses such as cancer
- having had a DVT (deep vein thrombosis) or PE in the past
- taking a hormone-based treatment such as the contraceptive pill
- lifestyle factors i.e. obesity or smoking

## **How do you know if you have a PE?**

There are many symptoms that could be caused by a PE such as:

- chest pain which is sharp and worse when you breathe in
- shortness of breath
- coughing
- feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- passing out

If you have some of these symptoms it could mean that you have a PE. However, sometimes these symptoms can be due to other problems such as infection. In order to be certain, we will collect details about your past medical history and your symptoms.

## **Tests**

After an examination, the doctors will arrange for you to have some tests to identify if you do have a PE. The tests may include:

- a chest X-ray
- a blood test called a D-dimer
- a Computed Tomography Pulmonary Angiography (CTPA) scan

The results of these tests will provide information which will determine the treatment you need.

## **What is a CTPA Scan?**

A Computed Tomography (CT) scanner is an X-ray machine which produces an image of a cross-section or a slice of the body. The scanner is a doughnut shape, about two feet thick, which you pass through on a couch. A narrow fan-shaped beam of X-rays is produced from inside and rotates in a complete circle around you. The X-rays pass through your body and are detected by electronic sensors. For a CTPA scan, dye is injected through a cannula (thin tube) into a vein in your arm.

This dye will travel through your blood system to the blood vessels in your lungs and make it easier to see if a clot is present. We may recommend that you need treatment such as a daily injection or a tablet whilst waiting for your scan. This will depend on the results of your blood test and examination. The treatment will help to prevent any blood clot dislodging or becoming bigger.

## **If a PE is not diagnosed**

Further tests may be necessary, or you may be referred back to your GP.

## **If a PE is diagnosed**

After discussion with you, a decision will be made about what treatment is best. The doctor will then begin the treatment.

## **Symptoms**

If you feel unwell and start to suffer any of the following symptoms, please dial 999 and state that you are under investigation for a PE.

- breathlessness
- dizziness
- chest pain
- coughing, especially if bringing up blood

## **Useful contact details**

If you are worried or have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

Ambulatory Care unit: Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, Saturday- Sunday 9am to 5pm

## **Further information**

NHS UK: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/pulmonary-embolism](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pulmonary-embolism)

British Lung Foundation: [www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/pulmonary-embolism](http://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/pulmonary-embolism)

Thrombosis UK: <https://thrombosisuk.org/information-fact-sheets.php>