

# Epidural Steroid Injection Safety

## *Frequently Asked Questions*



### Does Virginia Mason perform the injections?

Yes. Providers at Virginia Mason Seattle Main Campus, Virginia Mason Federal Way and Virginia Mason Lynwood are performing epidural steroid injections.

### What steps does Virginia Mason take to inform patients about the benefits and risks of epidural steroid injections?

Patients who come to Virginia Mason with back pain typically begin their care in Virginia Mason's Spine Clinic, where they are evaluated by a physician and a physical therapist at the same time. This team approach leads to safer and quicker recovery times. In many cases, patients can continue on a physical therapy program to recovery.

Patients who are candidates for an epidural steroid injection are given a thorough consultation by an expert, who is fellowship trained and board certified in pain medicine. This robust, multi-disciplinary approach to back pain allows every patient to have a complete evaluation and detailed discussion with her/his provider about the benefits and risks.

### How safe are epidural steroid injections?

Virginia Mason believes epidural steroid injections are safe and present many benefits for patients. The procedure has a long history and safe track record. It has been studied for 50 years and backed by international clinical research on its safety and outcomes. Virginia Mason has been performing the procedure for 20 years, and in that time, the procedure has resulted in no deaths or neurological injuries.

### Is the procedure FDA approved?

The procedure for epidural steroid injections is considered an evidence-based, "off-label" use of the drug. The steroid medications used in the injection are obtained

from commercial pharmaceutical companies that are FDA monitored. Other procedures in health care are performed "off label," which in no way undermines its safety and benefits to patients. Epidural steroid injections have undergone rigorous Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved clinical studies to demonstrate its safety and efficacy and, as stated above, have been studied for 50 years around the globe.

### What other safety measures does Virginia Mason take to ensure that the injection is performed properly to minimize any risk?

The procedure is always performed in a sterile environment; in a procedure room specifically designed for these procedures with the latest in technology and safety standards.

A fluoroscopy (or X-ray) is performed during the entire procedure for every patient. This is a standard practice at Virginia Mason and ensures the proper placement and administration of the drug.

Additionally, patients are evaluated after the procedure and throughout their recovery to optimal health. Patients are only administered another epidural steroid injection if they respond well and could benefit by another procedure. If they have a return of symptoms, patients are evaluated for other therapies. All patients have their care completely tailored to their specific needs and responses.

### Who performs the injections?

At Virginia Mason, a team of care providers is always in the room attending to patients. Typically two physicians, an attending MD and a fellow, perform the procedure. In many cases the team also includes a nurse or a medical assistant in the room to address all the patient's needs.