

## Pan-Dorset Cervical Spine Plain Film Imaging Guideline

This referral guideline has been agreed for use across Dorset and applies to imaging requests for adults via inpatients, outpatients, GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments.

**Cervical Spine X-Ray MAY be indicated to evaluate symptoms:**

- ✓ Trauma
- ✓ ? Crush fracture – osteoporosis with sudden increase in pain
- ✓ Previous surgery – instrumentation, fusion.
- ✓ ? Fracture – Ankylosing spondylitis.
- ✓ Patients with pacemakers (due to being unsuitable for MRI).
- ✓ Pre-operative surgery – either for C-spine surgery or pre-anaesthetic in rheumatoid arthritis.
- ✓ Flexion and extension views for instability –by specialist request.
- ✓ Scoliosis/kyphosis – Orthopaedic or rheumatology surgical cases + ? crush fracture.
- ✓ Neck pain with red flags

**Cervical Spine X-Ray is NOT routinely indicated:**

- ✗ Uncomplicated neck pain +/- radiculopathy less than 6/52 duration (see pathway)
- ✗ ?degenerative changes
- ✗ ?metastases with no proven primary
- ✗ ?changes in/diagnosis of ankylosing spondylitis
- ✗ Chiropractor referrals
- ✗ Cord compression
- ✗ Cervical spinal stenosis
- ✗ Investigation of possible vertebra-basilar insufficiency

<b>RED FLAGS suggestive of cancer/infection/inflammation:</b>	<b>RED FLAGS suggestive of cord compression:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malaise/fever/weight loss</li> <li>• Progressive increase in pain</li> <li>• Sleep disturbance</li> <li>• History of inflammatory e.g. arthritis, cancer, immunosuppression or chronic infection</li> <li>• Lymphadenopathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insidious onset</li> <li>• Gait disturbance</li> <li>• Clumsy or weak hands</li> <li>• Loss of sexual/bladder/bowel function</li> <li>• Lower limb UMN neurological signs</li> <li>• LMN signs upper limb</li> </ul>

### HELP US REDUCE UNNECESSARY IMAGING

**Typical 90% of over 50 year olds have degeneration on their cervical spine x-rays even without neck pain so plain films are extremely non-discriminatory and of limited benefit**

*For more information contact:*

*Radiology Clinical Lead at your nearest hospital; Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Poole Hospital or Dorset County Hospital.*

## Pan-Dorset Cervical Spine Plain Film Imaging Guideline

This referral guideline is based on the following clinical evidence/national best practice including:

**RCR iRefer:**

Plain x-ray for cervical spine is indicated only in specific circumstances

**NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary:** Neck pain – cervical radiculopathy April 2105:

Cervical x-rays, and other imaging studies/investigations are not routinely required to diagnose or assess pain with radiculopathy. 90% of over 50 year olds have degeneration on their cervical spine x-rays even without neck pain so plain films are extremely non-discriminatory and of limited benefit.

### Dorset Referral to Plain X-Ray Pathways for Patient's with Cervical Pain

