

This information will help you care for your child's cast. Please read it before leaving the orthopaedic clinic and ask the staff about anything you are unsure of.

Your child's arm has been placed in a cast (also called a plaster) to prevent bones from moving and to allow the broken bones time to rest and heal. It is important that you care for the cast correctly, as this will increase the chances of an early recovery.

Waiting for the plaster to dry:

- A plaster of paris arm cast takes 48 hours to dry
- A fiberglass leg cast takes 30 minutes
- Whilst the cast is drying rest your child's arm on something soft, e.g. pillows.
- Avoid hard surfaces as they can damage your child's cast
- Avoid using a heater or hairdryer to make the cast dry faster, as this could burn your child's skin and/or crack the plaster.

Elevate your child's arm above the level of their heart whenever possible, in a sling when moving about or on pillows when sitting. This is especially important during the first 48 hours to help prevent swelling.

Guidelines do's:

- Encourage your child to move their fingers for 5 minutes every hour
- Encourage your child to move their elbow or shoulder joint for 5 minutes every hour as this will help to prevent joint stiffness
- Check the colour of your child's fingers. They should be pink and warm. Squeeze the nail white, then release. The nail should immediately return to a pink colour.
- Check for swelling by comparing the hand in the cast to the other hand. They should be the same size.
- In the first week after the injury it is important to give your child regular pain relief as

instructed.

- Keep the cast clean and dry (See instruction on showering and bathing below).
- **Telephone the Orthopaedic clinic for an appointment if the plaster becomes loose, cracks, softens or is rubbing or uncomfortable.**

Guideline Don'ts:

- Avoid resting your child's plaster on a hard surface until it is completely dry.
- DO NOT poke anything down the plaster as this may cause a wound or damage.
- DO NOT remove the plaster, trim it or make any adjustments to it.
- If the plaster is causing your child problems you need to telephone the Orthopaedic clinic for advice or an appointment.
- DO NOT use the sling for longer than instructed.

Bathing and Showering:

The cast is not waterproof so it is important that you keep it dry during bathing and showering.

- You can wrap a towel around the cast and place your child's arm in a plastic bag, large enough to cover the cast. Make sure the bag does not have any holes in it. Use masking tape or cello tape to secure the bag.
- You may wish to purchase a shaped latex cast to cover the plaster for bathing and showering. Please ask the Orthopaedic Clinic Nurse for more information about this.

Clothing:

Your child will be able to wear any clothing that can easily be put on and off. Loose fitting clothes with wide sleeves are best. Dressing and undressing can be painful. To minimize discomfort follow these instructions:

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When putting on a shirt or top:

- Put the affected arm into the sleeve of the shirt. Move the shirt sleeve or top to above the elbow.
- Put your child's head through the neck of the shirt or top.
- Put the unaffected arm through the sleeve last.

When removing the shirt or top:

- Remove the unaffected arm from the sleeve
- Take the shirt or top over your child's head
- Remove the affected arm last

When should I seek help?

Immediately telephone Wellington Orthopaedic Clinic/Kenepuru Outpatients (during clinic hours) OR the Emergency Department (if after hours) if your child has:

- Severe or increasing pain under the cast which is not helped by pain relief
- A very swollen hand which does not decrease after the arm in the cast has been up on pillows for 20 minutes
- A change in temperature OR colour of your child's arm. A hot hand with purple or red fingers OR a cold hand which is dusky coloured or white.
- Numbness or tingling in their fingers or your child cannot move or straighten their fingers.
- If your child has a wound under the plaster AND they complain of increase pain, have a temperature, the cast smells bad or you notice ooze from the cast.

Telephone during clinic hours (see contact details) if your child has:

- A soft or cracked plaster
- Rubbing or the cast is uncomfortable
- The cast has become loose

Follow-up appointments:

Your child will be given an Orthopaedic clinic appointment so that their injury can be reviewed for progress.

It is important that your child returns for their follow-up appointments.

An X-Ray is taken to ensure that the bone is healing and in the correct place. This may be followed up with several appointments before the cast is removed.

Removing your child's cast:

Cast removal is a fast and painless process.

The cast will be removed with a specially designed saw which cuts through the cast, but will not cut the skin.

Following removal of the cast your child may experience increase pain or swelling. Your child's doctor will discuss exercises with you and your child may need to attend physiotherapy. Your child should not return to school or sporting activity until instructed to do so.

Contact us:

Remember If your child does not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5.30pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.