Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) Red Flag Alert

5 RED FLAGS - KNOW THE SIGNS

S - SADDLE ANAESTHESIA
P - PAIN
I - INCONTINENCE
N - NUMBNESS
E - EMERGENCY

Red Flag Alert

Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES)

www.spinalinjuries.ie
Cauda Equina Red Flag Alert

What is Cauda Equina Syndrome?
Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES) is a rare and complex clinical condition resulting in a severe narrowing of the spinal canal. It is usually caused by a prolapsed intervertebral disc. Symptoms can develop slowly over months or suddenly – within a few hours. If it occurs suddenly, CES is a medical emergency and requires immediate referral for investigation. Early diagnosis is essential. Early surgical decompression may result in a more favourable outcome in patients with CES.¹


5 Red Flag Alert

Know the signs

Saddle Anaesthesia:
Perianal or genital sensory loss.
Numbness of back passage or genitals.
Inability to feel toilet paper when wiping.

Pain:
Lower limb weakness; Uni- or bi-lateral weakness of one or more muscle groups e.g. ankle dorsi- or plantar flexors; may be accompanied by pain radiating down one or both legs.

Incontinence:
Bowel and/or bladder disturbances.
Loss of sensation of rectal fullness, constipation, Inability to stop a bowel motion.
Inability to urinate, difficulty initiating/stopping urination, Impaired sensation of urinary flow.

Numbness:
Sexual problems relating to genital sensory loss.
Loss of sensation during intercourse.

Emergency:
Any of these can be a warning sign of CES and may indicate the need for an emergency medical and surgical response.
Care pathway – A medical emergency

Investigate suspected or possible CES: Lower back pain plus bladder or bowel disturbance and / or saddle anaesthesia / paraesthesia, bilateral leg pain or neurological deficit.

Emergency MRI scan: Even short delays in diagnosis and treatment can lead to permanent disability.

Immediate referral for spinal surgery if CES is confirmed: A surgical opinion should be sought as soon as possible to decide if surgery is necessary.

Stage at diagnosis / outcomes
Diagnosis and treatment in the early stages can prevent or reduce lasting neurological damage.

- Irreversible urinary retention with overflow urinary incontinence
- Irreversible faecal incontinence
- Loss of sexual function
- Chronic pain
- Permanent paralysis

Spinal Injuries Ireland
Established 25 years ago, Spinal Injuries Ireland is the only support service for people who have sustained spinal cord injury and their families. We are a nationwide, person-centred service to assist people to engage fully in society following their injury.
Mission
SII’s mission is to engage with people with a spinal cord injury and their families, to address barriers to full participation in society and to empower them to work towards achieving personal, social and vocational goals.

This CES Red Flag initiative has been developed by Spinal Injuries Ireland and is supported by Coloplast

For more information
www.spinalinjuries.ie

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