

Spinal Tap

A spinal tap or LP (lumbar puncture) may be done to remove a small amount of spinal fluid for examination, to give medicine into the spinal canal or to measure the pressure in the spinal canal.

Before the Test

Before the test the doctor will examine your child. Blood may need to be drawn and tested before your child can have this procedure.

The test will be scheduled in the surgery center, main operating room, or procedure center.

Your child will have IV sedation or anesthesia for the procedure. This means your child will be given medicine to make him or her relax or sleep through the test.

The test will be done by a health care provider who is an expert in hematology (blood) or oncology (cancer).

How the Test Is Done

- The health care provider who is doing the test will feel your child's back and choose a space between the bones of the lower part of the spine to insert the needle. A germ-killing liquid (antiseptic solution) will be used to wash this spot on the skin. After the skin is washed, some towels will be put around the clean spot on the skin where the test will be done.
- It is very important that your child holds very still during the test. A nurse will hold your child to remind him or her to not move. If the health care provider cannot feel the bones, the LP may need to be done with image guidance, such as ultrasound or fluoroscopy.
- The provider will have your child lie down on his or her left side and "curl up in a ball" on a padded table in the treatment or exam room (Picture 1). It is important for your child to bend as much as possible.



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Picture 1 Having a spinal tap.

How the Test Is Done, *continued*

- After the skin is numb, a needle will be inserted into the spinal canal. A small amount of liquid that looks like water will drip into sample tubes.
- If medicine is ordered it will be given at this time.
- The needle will be removed and a small dressing (bandage) will be placed over the spot where the test was done.
- The fluid in the tubes will be sent to the lab for testing.

After the Test

After the procedure, your child will go to the recovery area and be checked frequently.

- Your child may be asked to lie flat for a little while to reduce the chance of getting a headache.
- Reading to him and quiet play will help him stay flat in bed.
- The spinal tap site should be checked regularly for bleeding or wetness.
- The site should be kept clean and dry.
- The bandage should stay in place for 24 hours and then be removed.
- Your child should not take a tub bath or shower while the bandage is in place.

Your child's doctor will explain the laboratory report and discuss the plan of treatment with you.