



Intimate Searches in Police Custody

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An Intimate Search is defined by law as a physical examination of body orifices other than mouth and could therefore include the ear, nose, rectum or vagina.

It requires the authority of a police inspector or above, if the detainee is arrested, and in police detention and they believe that:

The detainee may have concealed anything that could be used to cause physical injury to him/others or might be used whilst in detention.

Which cannot be found without an intimate search.

Police officers can carry out an intimate search without consent.

A doctor or nurse can carry out an intimate search but needs 'valid' and informed consent to do so.

Intimate searches can be carried out in a police station.

OR

The detainee had Class A drug concealed and had appropriate criminal intent.

Which cannot be found without an intimate search.

Police officers cannot carry out an intimate search with or without consent.

A doctor or other nurse can carry out an intimate search in but needs 'valid' and informed consent to do so.

Intimate searches (of the vagina or rectum) are **NOT** recommended, even with the aid of a speculum or proctoscope as it may result in injury to the patient or examiner, risk breaking the package, and may not reveal deeply located packages.

A Low Dose CT scan (LDCT) of the abdomen is the investigation of choice for suspected internal drug traffickers. However, consent is still required. Patients who refuse may require a period of monitoring in hospital

A doctor or other health care professional needs to

- Ensure that any urgent therapeutic interventions are prioritised.
- Ensure and document that proper authorisation has been obtained.
- Ensure that the detainee is fully aware of the risks of the search, the risk of not carrying out the search, the possibility that a police officer may carry out the search in certain cases and the fact that refusal may imply guilt.
- If consent is refused no further action in respect of the search should be carried out.
- If consent is agreed then the search should take place as detailed above.
- A local protocol between the police and local Emergency Department should be agreed and available to facilitate this.
- As sharp objects may be concealed in the rectum or vagina, if a digital examination is to be carried out then consideration should be given to undertaking a proctoscopy or speculum examination prior to it.

Police sometimes attempt to argue that a Class A drug could be used to cause harm and that an intimate search under the left hand column could be authorised and carried out by an officer, doctor, or nurse, without consent. **THIS IS NOT THE CASE and healthcare professionals should explain why and refuse.**

For more detailed guidance please see the FFLM/BMA document [Recommendations for Healthcare Professionals asked to perform intimate body search.](#)