



# 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/her/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 need 'valid' and informed consent to do so.**

Intimate searches can be carried out in a police station.

OR

The detainee has Class A drug concealed and has 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 nurse can carry out an intimate search but need '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 nurse 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.](#)