Video Swallow Study: What to Expect

In this handout, you will learn what to expect for the video swallow study and how to prepare.

WHAT IS A VIDEO SWALLOW STUDY?
A video swallow study (VSS) is an imaging test that helps doctors learn more about the following:

- How your son/daughter swallows food or liquid
- The strength of your son/daughter’s swallowing muscles
- If there is a risk of aspiration (certain foods or liquids going into the airway)

HOW DOES THE VSS WORK?
For the VSS, your son/daughter will swallow small amounts of a contrast liquid called barium. Barium can be swallowed from a bottle (for babies) or a cup (for children and teens).

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FOR THE VSS?

- The VSS takes about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Please arrive 15 minutes early. You can stay with your son/daughter for the VSS.
- Your son/daughter will sit in an infant seat or chair for the VSS, depending on his/her age.
- The VSS is done by a radiologic technologist (a person who does imaging tests) and a speech pathologist (a person who helps people with speech and swallowing concerns).
- Barium has a chalky, bitter taste. You can mix barium with small amounts of your son/daughter’s favorite foods or liquids.
- There are no side effects to barium. You might see a white color in your son/daughter’s stool after the VSS.

WHERE DO I CHECK IN FOR THE VSS?
Check in for the VSS at Pediatric Radiology on the Boston campus on Ellison 2. Below are directions on how to get to Pediatric Radiology:

1. Enter the main entrance of Massachusetts General Hospital.
2. Walk straight past the Information Desk. Coffee Central is straight ahead.
3. Just before Coffee Central, turn left toward the Ellison/Blake elevators.
4. Take the Ellison elevators to the 2nd floor.
5. Follow the signs for Pediatric Radiology.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR THE VSS?

- Do not feed or offer drinks to your son/daughter 2-3 hours before the scheduled exam time. Children tend to take part in the exam more if they are hungry.
- Bring your son/daughter’s favorite bottle, sippy cup or cup with a straw. You can bring more than one if your son/daughter typically drinks from more than one cup.
- Bring important reports from your son/daughter’s therapists or doctors that describe feeding or swallowing concerns.
- If your son/daughter eats solid food, bring his/her favorite chewable foods and purees to mix with the barium.
- If he/she has trouble swallowing a certain food or liquid, bring that food or liquid as well.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE VSS?
The speech-language pathologist will go over the video recording of the VSS and next steps before you leave. If the speech-language pathologist finds a swallowing disorder he/she might recommend follow-up care with a specialist (doctor who cares for specific medical concerns).