Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS
NHS Trust

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND PAEDIATRICS
PAEDIATRIC DEPT

Pulled Elbow

Amendments			
Date	**Page(s)**	**Comments**	**Approved by**
June 2013	New Guideline		Paediatric Guideline Group
March 2018		Whole document review – no changes	Paediatric Guideline Group

Compiled by: Dr Erin Dawson
Associate Specialist Emergency Paediatrics

In Consultation with:

Ratified by: Paediatric Guidelines Group

Date Ratified: June 2013

Date Reviewed: March 2018

Next Review Date: March 2021

Target Audience: Doctors, nurses and support staff working in Paediatrics

Impact Assessment Carried Out By:

Comment on this document to: Dr Erin Dawson

Pulled Elbow

What is a pulled elbow?

The injury is a subluxation of the head of the radius from the annular ligament. It is common in children up to the age of 5.

What causes a pulled elbow?

It is usually a traction injury when the forearm is pronated.
Occasionally it can occur after a fall or, in a smaller child, by rolling over on the arm.

What are the symptoms?

The child will cry, cracking noise may be heard and they will not then use the arm.
The child will present with the arm by the side with the forearm pronated, or will hold the wrist of the affected arm with the other hand. This is to prevent the elbow being moved, and can sometimes be misinterpreted as an injury to the wrist.

How is it diagnosed?

The history and examination with a high index of suspicion is usually all that is needed. The child should be examined with the arm by the side, and palpated for bony tenderness from the clavicle to the fingers. The only movement the child will resist is supination of the forearm. In an older child, or if there is any doubt about the diagnosis, and x-ray should be requested.

How is it treated?

The subluxation is manipulated using one of two methods. The examiners thumb is placed on the head of the radius and the forearm is either supinated or pronated and then flexed.

The child is observed in Paediatric A&E until they start to use their arm. They will then be discharged with an advice leaflet.

If they do not move the arm after a maximum of two attempts at manipulation, the child's arm should be placed in a collar and cuff and an appointment made for fracture clinic. If they subsequently want to use the arm, the sling can be removed and follow up will not be required. There is a risk of recurrence of the injury, but there is no likelihood of any long term damage if the subluxation is successfully relocated.

Prevention

It is best to avoid swinging games and pulling or lifting the child up by the hand.