

How do you decide if your patient with cervical spine injury needs imaging and what imaging test should you perform if they do?

STEP 1: Choosing a CDR:

1. The Canadian C-Spine Rule (CCR) is the CDR of first choice because of its high sensitivity and specificity. You should use it as your first choice CDR, IF:
 - a. The patient meets all inclusion criteria, AND
 - b. The patient has no exclusion criteria that would prevent the use of the CCR
2. If the patient cannot have the CCR used, NEXUS should be used, IF:
 - a. The patient meets all inclusion criteria for NEXUS AND
 - b. The patient has no exclusion criteria for NEXUS

Key points:

NEXUS has lower specificity than the CCR so if you use it in preference to CCR, you will probably perform more imaging on people without injuries.

NEXUS has fewer inclusion and exclusion criteria than CCR so can be used in a wider range of patients, including patients who are excluded by the CCR like:

- Pregnant women
- People with pre-existing spinal disease or prior surgery

STEP 2: How do I choose which imaging test to do if my patient needs imaging?

1. Patients with higher probability of injury should have CT
2. Patients with lower probability of injury should have plain radiography because of the considerably lower radiation dose

