

From The Chief Medical Officer:  
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To: Medical Directors of Trusts and Private Hospitals  
to forward immediately to :  
ENT Surgeons  
Plastic Surgeons

Dear Doctor

### **DIATHERMY FOR TONSIL OR ADENOID SURGERY**

The purpose of this letter is to advise that with immediate effect diathermy should not be used for tonsil or adenoid surgery. The only exception to this is when the surgeon is unable to control haemorrhage by other means. Surgeons are reminded that all equipment employed in tonsil and adenoid surgery must be discarded after use on a single patient and never reused.

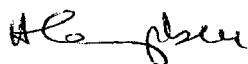
Following identification of an increased reported incidence of haemorrhage after tonsil and adenoid surgery. The Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre issued a Hazard Notice in October 2001 (HN(NI) 2001/19). This identified and addressed a number of problems with single use electrosurgical diathermy forceps. Following the issuing of this Notice, the number of reported adverse events associated with this surgery has fallen. However, the Department of Health (London) has continued to receive reports including one recent fatality. Therefore in the interests of patient safety surgeons should cease using diathermy for tonsil and adenoid operations until these reports have been thoroughly investigated and the aetiology determined.

The Medical Devices Agency, the Purchasing and Supply Agency and the Department of Health (London) are working in close co-operation with ENT surgeons and their professional association to find a solution that enables diathermy to be safely reintroduced for tonsil and adenoid surgery.

I appreciate that this will cause disruption to the service but we feel that this immediate response is necessary to ensure patient safety.

For further enquiries: on general policy - contact Dr Margaret Boyle: Tel: 028 90 520713  
on medical devices - contact Dr Glenda Mock: Tel 028 90 520710.

Yours sincerely



**DR HENRIETTA CAMPBELL  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**