

Dear Doctor

As you are aware, the above patient has undergone a total laryngectomy and is fitted with a tracheoesophageal voice prosthesis situated between the trachea and oesophagus. These voice prostheses function as a one way valve allowing air to pass through from the trachea to the oesophagus to create sound for voicing. Overtime, the mechanism on these valves begins to fail and patients experience fluid coming through the valve and into the trachea causing coughing and if untreated, a chest infection.

Ordinarily we would see patients in the outpatient department to change the valve within a couple of days of leakage being observed. Given the developing situation regarding Covid-19, we are trying to help patients manage leakage through the voice prosthesis at home. This could help to prevent additional trips to the hospital and keep patients safe at home. All patients are being sent a tracheoesophageal plug, which prevents fluid from leaking through the valve but some patients find these difficult to use. We are therefore also advising patients to use thickening powder in all drinks if they begin to experience leakage. The thicker fluids, limits or stops leakage through the valve allowing patients to continue to drink safely.

Please can you arrange for the above patient to be given a prescription of thickening powder such as Nutilis Clear and allow them to pick this up from their usual prescription collection point e.g. the surgery or pharmacy within the next few days.

Any patient who experiences leakage through the voice prosthesis should contact Speech and Language Therapy as normal, so that further information and instructions can be given.