

Risks of having an epidural or spinal to reduce labour pain

Type of risk	How often does this happen?	How common is it?
Itching	One in every 3 to 10 women depending on the drug and dose used	Common
Significant drop in blood pressure	One in every 50 women	Occasional
Not working well enough to reduce labour pain so you need to use other ways of reducing the pain	One in every 8 to 10 women	Common
Not working well enough for a Caesarean section so you need to have a general anaesthetic	One in every 20 women	Occasional
Severe headache	One in every 100 women (epidural) One in every 500 women (spinal)	Uncommon
Nerve damage (numb patch on a leg or foot, or having a weak leg)	Temporary – one in every 1,000 to 2,000 women	Quite rare
Effects lasting for more than 6 months	Permanent – one in every 24,000 women	Rare
Meningitis	One in every 100,000 women	Very rare
Abscess (infection) in the spine where the needle was inserted for the spinal or epidural	One in every 50,000 women	Very rare
Haematoma (blood clot) in the spine where the needle was inserted for the spinal or epidural	One in every 168,000 women	Very rare
Abscess or haematoma causing severe injury including paralysis (paraplegia)	One in every 100,000 women	Very rare
A large amount of local anaesthetic being accidentally injected into a vein in the spine	One in every 100,000 women	Very rare
A large amount of local anaesthetic being accidentally injected into spinal fluid, which may cause difficulty in breathing and very rarely unconsciousness	One in every 2,000 women	Quite rare

The information available from the published documents does not give accurate figures for all of these risks. The figures shown above are estimates and may be different in different hospitals.