

# Did you know?

## Cauda equina syndrome



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From January 2008 to December 2018, NHS Resolution received 827 claims for incidents of cauda equina syndrome. Out of these 827 claims, **340** were settled with damages, 212 were without merit and 275 remain open. This has cost the NHS:

# £186,134,049

This includes payments for claimant legal costs, NHS legal costs and damages.

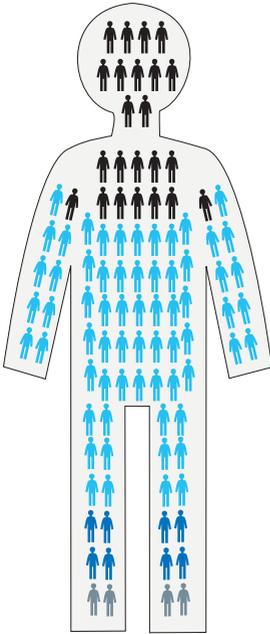
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Cauda equina syndrome can result from a ruptured disc in the lower back, a narrowing of the spinal canal, a spinal tumour, fracture, haemorrhage or infection. It can also result from a trauma such as a car accident, gunshot wound, a stabbing or a fall.

The patient's vertebral discs prolapse and compress the nerves descending from the end of the spinal cord (the cauda equina).



## Age range of claimants



- 51-85 years: 23%
- 31-50 years: 65%
- 0-30 years: 8%
- Unknown: 4%

## Key causes of claims for cauda equina syndrome are due to delays in

- specialist centre referrals
- diagnosing/recognising symptoms
- MRI scanning (time, access, referral)
- responding to 'red flag' symptoms
- surgical intervention
- transport to hospital or specialist centre

It may also be caused as a result of surgery.

If the condition is not addressed at an early stage, it can result in life-changing injuries which are often associated with significant psychological effects. In some cases, cauda equina syndrome increases the risk of death.

## Red flag symptoms that require rapid investigation and treatment can include:



- Sciatica in both legs
- anal and/or buttock numbness
- loss of feeling between the legs (saddle anaesthesia)
- motor weakness, sensory loss or pain in both legs
- bladder retention and/or incontinence
- bowel disturbance/incontinence

Last revised March 2018 by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE): Back pain - low (without radiculopathy)  
Red flag symptoms and signs: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/back-pain-low-without-radiculopathy#!diagnosisSub:1>

## What can you do?

- Understand the hidden costs of investigating serious incidents and claims by reading the serious incident cost calculator: <http://psmu.improvement.nhs.uk/psc-shared-library/tools-and-guides/14-healthcare-serious-incident-cost-calculator/file>
- Ensure your local guidance compliments NICE guidelines
- Ongoing education to ensure clinicians are educated and updated regularly
- Review your organisation's claims history regarding cauda equina syndrome and ensure that learning is shared with all clinicians
- Review patient information resources to include evidence-based practices and patient support organisation's.

For further information please contact: [safety@resolution.nhs.uk](mailto:safety@resolution.nhs.uk)

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[www.resolution.nhs.uk](http://www.resolution.nhs.uk)



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