Lumbar punctures (spinal taps) are frequently done as a part of the diagnosis or treatment of certain diseases, including meningitis, cancer and other conditions. The purpose is to remove some cerebral spinal fluid (CSF). Cerebral spinal fluid surrounds the brain and spinal cord. The CSF will be sent to the lab to look for abnormal cells. Lumbar punctures may also be done to give medications, such as chemotherapy, directly into the CSF.

Lumbar punctures may be done in a treatment room, clinic exam room or occasionally in the operating room or recovery room. IV medication may be used to help your child relax. A topical anesthetic cream may be applied to the site.

Your child will be positioned on his side, with his knees drawn to his chest and his head bent downward. This helps spread the bones of the spine apart. It may be that some children will sit upright with their chest and head bent over a pillow. The lower back is cleansed, then covered with a sterile towel. A needle is inserted between the two sections of the lower backbone, below the spinal cord. The cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) is allowed to drip out of the needle into a tube. The needle is then removed. A Band-Aid® is then placed over the site.

If chemotherapy is to be given, it will be given through the same needle. The needle is then removed. A Band-Aid® is then placed over the site.

Most children are able to resume normal activity 30 minutes following the procedure.

Call your child’s doctor or nurse at ________________________________ if:

- Your child has a severe headache that is not controlled with pain medication.
- Your child vomits once or more.
- Your child has severe back or leg pain.
- There is bleeding from the lumbar puncture site.
- There is leakage of clear fluid from the lumbar puncture site.
- There is redness or swelling at the lumbar puncture site.
- You have questions or concerns.