

# Hair removal prior to phalloplasty surgery



Some people seeking phalloplasty do require some hair removal before surgery for the area of skin that will become the urethra (the tube through which urine leaves the body). This depends on which part of the body is intended to be used for donor tissue to create the urethra of the penis. Your surgeon will discuss this with you and let you know if hair removal is required, and if so, this will be funded by the NHS.

## What area of skin needs treating?

Potential donor areas include forearm, thigh, or lower abdomen (the part of the tummy below the belly button). The surgeon will mark the area, plus 1-2 cm margin (and with your permission, take a picture) for the hair removal provider to work on.

## Do I have to have it?

It is **very** important to make sure any required hair removal is completed before surgery, because if there is any coarse (thick) hair left behind, then you may get hair regrowing in the urethra. This is very hard to treat and can lead to discomfort, infections and potentially affect urine flow.

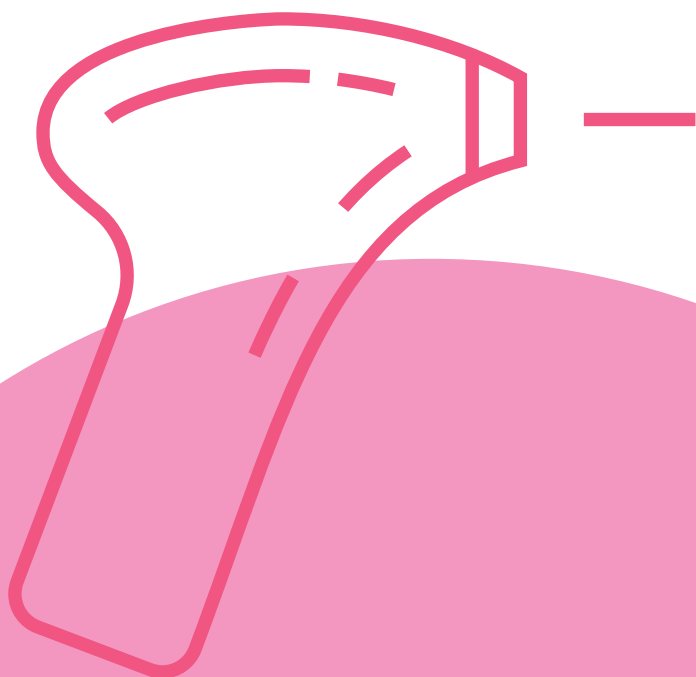
## Post treatment:

Your hair removal provider will need to check the area 12 weeks after hair removal seems to be complete, to assess for any problematic regrowth of hair. With your permission they will send pictures of the hair removal site for the surgeon to check. The surgeon may want to see you in person, if the pictures are not clear, before they book you for surgery. Generally speaking, if 70% or more of your hair has been removed and is still gone at 12 weeks after treatment, that will be enough to go ahead with surgery.

## Methods of Epilation:

There are two methods that may be used for donor site hair removal – the following information is designed to help you choose which might be best for you. Laser is a much faster option, but not suitable for everyone. Sometimes people benefit from both laser and electrolysis, if there is a mix of hair colours – e.g. some of your hair is grey or white. Your hair removal provider will be able to advise you on this during the initial appointment.

If both laser and electrolysis are required, usually it is best to have laser and then electrolysis on the hairs that laser cannot treat.



# Laser

## How it works:

The objective of laser treatment is to produce permanent hair reduction without damaging the surrounding tissue. During hair removal, a laser produces a light that is absorbed by the melanin (pigment) in the hair. The light energy is converted to heat, which damages the hair follicle (the sheath surrounding the root of a hair) and prevents regrowth of dark hair.

## Will it be suitable for me?

As laser light is attracted to melanin in the hair, it works best on dark hair and light skin. However, modern lasers now are able to treat hair on most skin tones with good results. Red, very blonde, white or grey hair is not suitable for laser treatment.

The hair reduction provider will go through your suitability and medical history prior to treatment. Certain health conditions and medications have an effect on the skin, but this will be discussed at the first appointment (consultation), where a patch test will be carried out. A patch test is treating a small area of hair first to check how your skin and hair reacts and to adjust the settings of the laser to achieve the best results.

Some people may benefit from having laser hair reduction initially, followed by electrolysis for any lighter or grey hair.

## Is it permanent?

It is considered to be permanent hair reduction. Fewer hairs re-grow as treatment progresses, and this hair is much finer 'downy' type that is not problematic for the surgical site – your hair reduction provider will talk to you about this when treatment is complete. However, only hair containing dark pigment will respond to this treatment.

## How many sessions might I need?

This varies but for donor site laser treatment you will need to have as many sessions as required to ensure hair is reduced enough to be ready for surgery – the NHS covers this cost.

## How long and how often are the sessions?

This can vary – sessions are usually no longer than an hour and take place every 4-6 weeks.

## Does it hurt?

It can be uncomfortable. New laser technologies are more advanced and effective, with less discomfort, as they are fitted with integrated cooling systems. Certain topical numbing creams may also be used, your hair reduction provider can advise.

## Does it have side effects, and will my skin be damaged?

The following temporary side effects are reported:

- Redness and/or tenderness of the treatment area.
- Itchiness, mild irritation, swelling or “tingling” which normally disappears within 48 hours.

Rarely, the following can occur:

- Folliculitis (inflammation of the hair follicles) and/or itching can occur and can be reduced by increased personal hygiene (new razor, fresh towels and face cloths) and by using anti-inflammatory / antibacterial and skin-calming lotions.
- Hypo or hyperpigmentation – lightening or darkening of the area of skin. This can be temporary or permanent. Patch testing will be carried out on the skin prior to treatment.
- Rarely, an increase in hair growth can be seen after treatment - where more hair enters the next growing phase than usual, but the next treatment will remove this hair.

## Pre and post treatment considerations:

Ensure you do not have sun exposure in the few weeks before and after treatment. Your provider will be able to give specific guidance on sun exposure. It is best to shave in the 24 hours prior to each session but **do not** wax, pluck or use hair removing creams, as the hair needs to be present in the follicle but very short in length. Leave 2 days after treatment before shaving. Avoid getting hot and sweaty for 24 hours after treatment – don’t go to the gym or sauna – to allow your skin to cool down. Avoid using perfumed lotions for 24 - 48 hours after treatment.

## How do I choose a provider?

You may wish to consider the location of the provider, their opening hours, accessibility, how long the provider has been offering laser hair removal, their reviews, and what type of laser they use. Ultimately, you will need to consult with the laser provider to decide whether the treatment they offer will be right for you.

## IPL

IPL (Intense Pulsed Light) has some similarities with laser but is not available for NHS-funded hair reduction as part of the gender dysphoria pathway.



# Electrolysis

## How it works:

Electrolysis involves the insertion of a small fine needle into the hair follicle, followed by a small electrical current that damages and eventually destroys the hair follicle. There are 3 different methods to achieve this:

- **Thermolysis:** uses a high frequency alternating current that is passed down through the needle to the hair follicle. The high frequency causes vibration in the cells of the hair follicle to produce enough heat to destroy the follicle.
- **Galvanic electrolysis:** a direct electric current is passed down a needle into the hair follicle where it creates a chemical reaction. This reaction converts salt in the tissue into sodium hydroxide, which then destroys the follicle. Galvanic electrolysis is not widely used except in blend modality.
- **Blend:** combines both the galvanic and thermolysis methods, using the heat of thermolysis to speed the chemical reaction of galvanic.

## Will it be suitable for me?

Electrolysis can treat any hair colour. Most people can have electrolysis. However, it should not be used for people with pacemakers or defibrillators because it can interrupt the electronics.

## Is it permanent?

Yes, electrolysis is considered permanent hair reduction after progressive treatments.

## How many sessions might I need?

Electrolysis takes time, a lot longer than laser hair reduction. This varies widely from person to person, depending on hair density, pain tolerance, and how much hair you need removed. Your electrolysis provider may be able to give a very rough estimate at your initial consultation. For donor site hair reduction the NHS funding covers however many sessions it takes to complete the treatment ready for surgery.

## Does it hurt?

Again, this varies widely from person to person. Some people find it helpful to use a topical numbing cream prior to treatment – talk to your electrolysis provider about this at your consultation.

## Does it have side effects, and will it damage my skin?

People often report it is painful or uncomfortable, but this is short-lived. There may be brief redness and swelling, and occasional tiny reddish pinprick scabs. Scarring is rare and should not be expected. Infection is rare and should not occur if aftercare advice is followed. It should not cause damage to your skin. A patch test will take place before treatment starts, to find the best settings for your hair reduction.

## Pre and post treatment considerations:

Avoid sweating, sun, make up, and swimming for 48 hours after treatment and use an aftercare product as recommended by your electrolysis provider.



# Referral process:

**Your Surgical Provider can refer you to GDNRSS for donor site hair reduction.** This will mean sending details about you including name, address, General Practitioner (GP), planned surgery and gender dysphoria diagnosis. You will need to agree to this in order for the referral to proceed. Personal data is kept under strict control under data protection laws.

If you have not already chosen your hair reduction provider, the GDNRSS team will contact you to confirm your provider choice.

You will be able to access the **GDNRSS Nurse-led virtual consultation service** (phone, video call or email) if you have any questions. See below for details of how to access this service.

Once GDNRSS has notified your chosen provider, and they have accepted, you will be able to go and book your initial consultation and patch test and decide with the hair reduction provider on the course of treatment. **We recommend that you do thorough research beforehand and make an initial phone call to the provider as the funding only covers 1 in person consultation and patch test (unless treatment is not suitable).**

**Once Treatment Begins:** You will be under the care of your chosen hair reduction provider. To ensure the best possible outcome, you need to follow any advice given and attend appointments within the timeframe agreed, as results are time sensitive. You will also need to adhere to their service guidelines and policies. This includes rules around conduct, cancellations and no shows.

**Post treatment:** The hair reduction provider will arrange to see you 12 weeks after the end of treatment to check for any hair regrowth. If there is no regrowth, then your surgical provider can look at booking you for your surgery. If there is regrowth, then more sessions will be needed.

**It is extremely important that treatment is fully complete before surgery – as explained before, it is impossible to treat the hair post-surgery with electrolysis and laser. Hair regrowing in the urethra can cause discomfort and infections and revision surgery may be necessary.**

**Change of personal details:** If you have changed your name or moved address, please ensure that you communicate this change to us and your hair reduction provider. If the name you give the hair reduction provider does not match the one the Gender Dysphoria Clinic has given us, it could delay or prevent payment for this service. However, please feel free to inform your hair reduction provider of any alternative name you would prefer to be known by and they will be happy to make you welcome and comfortable.

**Gender Dysphoria National Referral Support Service  
NHS Arden and Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Unit**

**T: 01522 857799**

**E: [agem.gd-hairreduction@nhs.net](mailto:agem.gd-hairreduction@nhs.net)**

**W: [ardengemcsu.nhs.uk](http://ardengemcsu.nhs.uk)**



# Who can I contact if I have a question?

**If you have any queries or require advice you can contact your:**

- Surgical team
- GP
- Gender Dysphoria Clinic

The NHS Gender Dysphoria National Referral Support Service (GDNRSS) have a support line available for questions and queries regarding specialist gender surgery in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**We can answer questions relating to:**

- General enquiries
- Clinical or non-clinical information
- Your referral
- The status of your chosen hospital for your surgical referral
- Information relating to travel and any other practicalities

A blue and pink banner for the NHS Gender Dysphoria National Referral Support Service (GDNRSS). The left side is blue with white text and a laptop icon. The right side is pink with white text and an illustration of diverse people. The NHS logo is in the top right.

Book a consultation (video, telephone or email) with one of our trained Specialist Nurse Advisors who are available to discuss a wide variety of issues relating to gender surgery. Specialities include top surgery, feminising surgery and masculinising surgery.

For more information contact: 

Telephone: 01522 857799 Email: [agem.gdnrss@nhs.net](mailto:agem.gdnrss@nhs.net)

The service is open to anyone aged 17 or over who has been referred for or is considering gender surgery.

## Contacting you

- Your GDC will ask you if you prefer to be contacted by the GDNRSS team via email or letter and this will be recorded on your file.
- We will email or write to you to let you know your referral has been received and how this has been processed using your preferred contact method.
- We will not be aware of any changes in your personal circumstances, therefore any correspondence from us will be sent to the address or email provided by you to your GDC.
- Please ensure that your contact details are up to date with us and your GDC and contact us if you have a different way you would prefer us to make contact.
- We value your views to help improve services and we may on occasion contact you to gather information about your experience and outcomes after surgery, which is known as patient reported outcome measures (PROMs).



# How we use your information

Referrals are sent to us using a confidential electronic referral system.

- Once received, referrals are securely stored, and our referral system is governed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- We take our responsibility to protect your data and confidentiality extremely seriously and the information we receive can only be used by trained staff who work under close supervision.

**We do not share your information with anyone other than those involved in your care and treatment.**



**We are available from:**  
Monday – Friday  
9am – 5pm



**You can contact us via telephone:**  
Telephone Number –  
01522 857799

## Feedback



Please let us know if you do not want us to contact you to complete patient surveys. If you would like to provide feedback, please email us at: [agem.gdnrss@nhs.net](mailto:agem.gdnrss@nhs.net)

If you require information in another language or format, please contact the team at: [agem.gdnrss@nhs.net](mailto:agem.gdnrss@nhs.net)