

Clinician FAQs

Why can't my patient get an outpatient CT exam with contrast?

Due to a supply chain issue related to COVID-19 lockdowns overseas, there is a global shortage of iodinated contrast. The contrast agents (Omnipaque, Visipaque, Isovue, Optiray) that VUMC have on supply are limited and must be rationed for use in emergency settings (such as persons experiencing myocardial infarction or stroke).

When did the supply chain issue start? When do we expect to get iodinated contrast agents back in stock?

This issue with obtaining iodinated contrast began in late April 2022. We currently do not have a reliable projection of when our supplies of these contrast agents will be replenished, but shortages are expected to continue through the summer.

How are we conserving iodinated contrast supplies?

In addition to the limitations on ordering outpatient CT exams with contrast, we are also:

- Decreasing the amount of iodinated contrast agent, we are administering in each dose (for several exams)
- Splitting vials of contrast agents, where appropriate between among patients (under guidance of Infection Control)
- Using alternative contrast agents and diluting other agents, as appropriate, in high-volume areas

Are inpatient contrasted CT exams affected by the shortage?

All contrasted CT exams are affected by the shortage of iodinated contrast agents. However, we are currently not limiting scheduling of inpatients for these exams, but all ordering clinicians will need to attest that they are taking conservation precautions when placing the order.

What do I need to do if I want to order an outpatient contrasted CT exam?

You have three options for outpatient orders placed on or after May 3, 2022:

1. Order an alternative imaging exam, if appropriate, such as non-contrasted CT, ultrasound, or MRI. Review the [ACR guidelines](#) to evaluate alternate options. A new order must be placed for any alternative exam.
2. Schedule patient at an alternative non-VUMC location where the study can be performed. Non-VUMC outpatient radiology facilities may have access to additional contrast supply. Please be sure to cancel your current VUMC order to avoid duplicate patient appointments.
3. Defer the examination to a later date (August 2022 or later) if it would not impact patient care.
4. If you deem the contrasted CT exam necessary at Vanderbilt-affiliated imaging facilities, this requires approval by an attending Radiologist. Approvals to schedule outpatient contrasted CT exams will be given only for extraordinary circumstances. To determine if your patient's situation meets these criteria:
 - Place the order as usual in Epic.
 - Within the order composer, click on the link to the [RedCap survey](#) and provide the required information.

- The completed [RedCap survey](#) will trigger consultation by an attending Radiologist to determine the appropriateness of the contrasted exam. You will receive an Epic InBasket message or a phone call letting you know of next steps.
- If you need to speak immediately to an attending Radiologist or need the exam performed on the same day, page 615.831.4220.

What do I need to do if my patient is already scheduled for a contrasted CT?

You will receive a list of patients with upcoming appointments for contrasted CT exams. For these patients with existing orders, you have three options:

1. Order an alternative non-CT examination, if appropriate, such as a non-contrasted CT, ultrasound, or MRI. Review the [ACR guidelines](#) to evaluate alternate options. A new order must be placed for any alternative exam.
2. Reschedule at an alternative non-VUMC location where the study can be performed. Some non-Vanderbilt outpatient radiology facilities may have access to additional supply. Please be sure to cancel your current order to avoid duplicate patient appointments.
3. Defer the contrasted CT examination to August 2022 or later.

I need help determining what I should do for my patient. Is there someone that can help me?

Yes, the Radiology team is available to answer questions or provide guidance, including the following:

- Navigating the [RedCap survey](#)
- Identifying alternative exams
- Triaging CT with contrast requests for extraordinary circumstances
- Providing more guidance on how to cancel/place new imaging orders
- Serving as a consultation service for you regarding difficult patient questions

This Radiology team is available via pager at 615.831.4220.

What happens if my patient needs a contrasted CT exam before August 2022?

Beginning May 3, scheduling outpatient contrasted CT exams at Vanderbilt-affiliated imaging facilities requires approval by an attending Radiologist. Approvals for orders for outpatient contrasted CT exams will be given only for extraordinary circumstances. To determine if your patient's situation meets these criteria:

- Place the order as usual in Epic.
- Within the order composer, click on the link to the [RedCap survey](#) and provide the required information.
- The completed RedCap survey will trigger consultation by a Radiologist to determine the appropriateness of the contrasted exam. You may receive a phone call letting you know of next steps.
- If you need to speak immediately to an attending Radiologist or need the exam performed on the same day, page 615.831.4220.

When will patients be able to get their contrasted CT exams?

We currently do not have a reliable projection of when our supplies of these contrast agents will be replenished. Patients who have an existing order for contrasted CT exams will be rescheduled with

appointments beginning in August 2022. If supplies are not available by that timeframe, we will reschedule them to a later date based on the data we have at that time.

Since Vanderbilt doesn't have iodinated contrast, can patients go somewhere else for a contrasted CT?

Perhaps – the iodinated contrast supply chain issue is a global problem, with many other health systems and imaging centers experiencing similar contrast shortage problems as Vanderbilt. There may be some facilities that are still offering CT scans with contrast, but that can change on a day-to-day basis depending on the supply of contrast on hand that day.

What should I tell my patients if they choose to go somewhere else for their contrasted CT?

The images from CT exams performed outside of the Vanderbilt system will not be available in our clinical systems for review. Please instruct the patient to request a CD of their images as well as a printout of the examination report from the alternate imaging site, as these items will assist their care here at Vanderbilt.

Can I just refer my patients to one of our regional hospital affiliates to receive their contrasted CT scan?

Our regional hospitals (Bedford, Tullahoma, Wilson County) are experiencing the same contrast shortage as the downtown hospital. There may be opportunities for your patient to receive an MRI scan at our affiliate sites, if medically necessary and urgent. If your patient falls into the category of being close to or willing to travel to an affiliate location, and MRI is a viable alternative to their contrasted CT, please call Radiology at 615.831.4220 for further assistance in scheduling.

If my patients can wait until after August 2022 for their contrasted CT exams, how will they be rescheduled? Is there something I need to do?

Vanderbilt scheduling staff will reschedule all patients with existing orders for contrasted CT exams who are scheduled before August 2022. You do not need to do anything. If your patients receive a contrasted CT exam from a non-Vanderbilt location, please cancel the order within Epic—otherwise, the patient will be rescheduled.

What explanation should I give to my patients explaining why their scans are being delayed?

The following statement should be sufficient:

“We use a specific type of drug to help us better see and understand the images we take of your body. The supplies of this drug have been affected by supply chain issues related to COVID-19 lockdowns in China. We are working hard to get it back in stock. This means we must delay your scans for the time being. We will get you rescheduled as soon as possible.”

Are contrasted MRI exams affected by the shortage? Can I order an MRI as an alternate exam for my patient since it's a higher-powered exam?

While the MRI contrast agent (gadolinium) is not currently impacted by the supply chain issues, we do not recommend ordering an MRI as an alternate exam unless medically necessary and urgent. Vanderbilt tries to reserve our MRI capacity for vulnerable, higher acuity patients. The Radiology team can help you determine a more appropriate exam for your patient's situations.

What are my options for patients who have indwelling hardware/pacemaker and cannot receive an MRI?

Even if you have metal hardware or implants in your body you may be able to have an MRI. Some patients with pacemakers can receive an MRI. An MRI technologist and/or radiologist can assist you with determining the safety for MRI. For patients with certain types of pacemakers, we will consider whether the necessity of a contrasted CT exam meets our criteria for an extraordinary circumstance.

Will my patient need a new authorization approval if their Contrast CT is downgraded to a Non-contrasted CT?

If the exam moves from a Contrast CT to a Non-contrasted CT, new authorization approval is not necessary.

If I order an alternative exam (e.g., non-contrasted CT, ultrasound) as a short-term solution for my patients, will they still be able to get their contrasted CT exams later this year when supplies are restored? Will I need to write a new order for the contrasted CT exam?

Yes. If the original contrasted CT appointment is canceled or rescheduled, the exam will be rescheduled by a scheduling team member when supply chains improve. A new order will not be needed. Please do not cancel the original order, only the patient's appointment. Canceling the original order will require a new order to be placed.

Will my patient be billed twice if they receive a non-contrast CT study, but are subsequently identified as needing a contrasted CT by radiology to rule out something possibly emergent on the non-contrasted CT (I.E. Fluid collection that may represent blood or abdominal abscess)?

Patients will be charged for a CT with/without contrast if this occurs. Patients will not be charged for two separate examinations if they are performed on the same day. Patients will not need a second authorization approval in these situations, as it is deemed an emergent measure given the radiologist's recommendation. However, if the patient ends up needing a second exam on a later date, then both exams will be billed separately.

Who can I contact if I have a question on the shortage?

There are several ways to contact our Radiology team:

1. Email: contrast.crisis.management@vumc.org
2. Pager: 615.831.4220
3. REDCap: scan this QR Code:



or via this link: <https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/?s=FKEHWXARRF38PKCW>

