

# **X-Rays and Asylum Seeking Children: Policy Statement**

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The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health understand that the Home Office is proposing the routine use of bone X-rays to determine the age of young asylum seekers. We have expressed our concern about this and requested that action is taken to reverse this decision. There is no good research evidence for the use of X-rays for age-assessment, and we urge that the Home Office reviews its position.

We accept the need for some form of age assessment in some circumstances, but there is no single reliable method for making precise estimates. The most appropriate approach is to use a holistic evaluation, incorporating narrative accounts, physical assessment of puberty and growth, and cognitive, behavioural and emotional assessments. Such assessments will provide the most useful information on which to plan appropriate management.

The proposal to use X-rays is flawed on two counts. Firstly, there are clinical and ethical issues associated with the use of ionising radiation for this purpose, particularly in the absence of informed consent, and a clinical benefit from the procedure. Secondly, radiological assessment is extremely imprecise and can only give an estimate within two years in either direction. The information obtained would not contribute any greater accuracy to the assessment than the methods outlined above - and indeed would be less clinically useful.