

Adrenal crisis is a life threatening emergency caused by the adrenal glands inability to produce sufficient cortisol in response to major stress. Adrenal insufficiency occurs when the adrenal glands are unable to produce sufficient mineralocorticoid or glucocorticoid hormones.

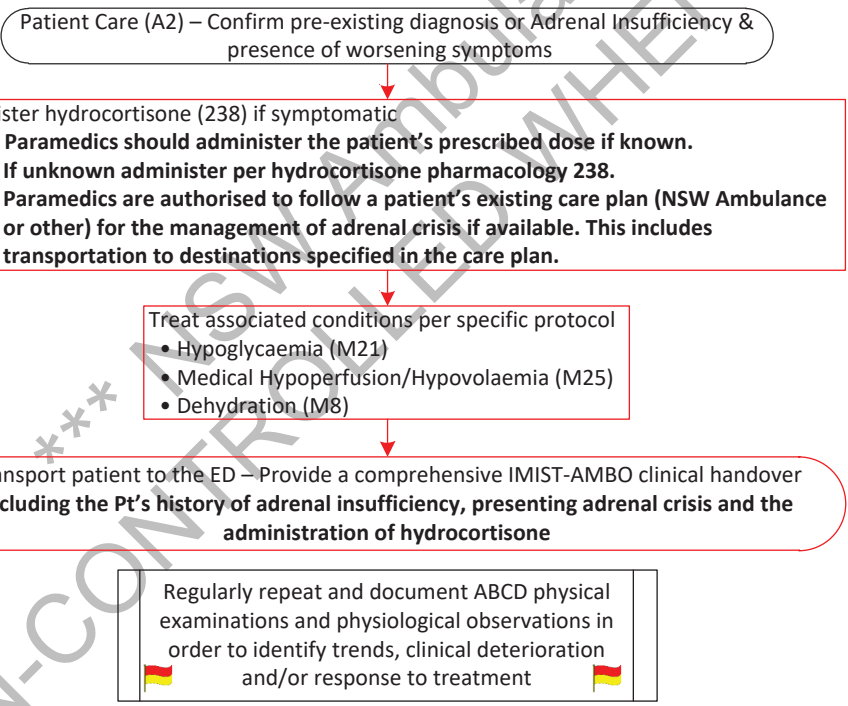
**Types of Adrenal Insufficiency:**

- 1. Primary:** Diseases of the adrenal gland e.g. Addison’s Disease, Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAS), Adrenoleukodystrophy
- 2. Secondary:** Diseases of the pituitary gland (ACTH deficiency) or hypothalamus e.g. Hypopituitarism; Craniopharyngioma/other suprasellar tumours; head injuries
- 3. Iatrogenic (chronic corticosteroid treatment):** e.g. Crohn’s disease, Juvenile arthritis, SLE, Asthma, Nephrotic syndrome, Haemangiomas

**An ADRENAL CRISIS can be precipitated by a significant illness, trauma or stress:** High fevers, serious infection, diarrhoea, vomiting (possible dehydration), lethargy, pallor, drowsiness, mental confusion, or sustaining a serious injury, e.g. fractures; head injuries; and/or non-compliance with medications. If left untreated, it can be fatal.

**Paramedics should not discount a request for hydrocortisone (238) administration from a patient with adrenal insufficiency as signs and symptoms of adrenal crisis may vary from patient to patient.**

**Treatment:**



**Adrenal Crisis – Signs and Symptoms**

- Nausea, vomiting & diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain, weakness
- High fever
- Lethargy, pallor
- Rapid heart rate
- Mottled appearance, peripheral shutdown
- Low blood pressure, postural hypotension
- Hypoglycaemia
- Dizziness, mental confusion/loss of consciousness

**Note: Any, or all, of the above signs and symptoms may be present**