Consider strategies to improve ease of intubation in patients with a predicted difficult airway (class III-IV) (eg, video-assisted laryngoscopy, awake intubation). For patients with identified or anticipated difficult airways, consider involving other airway specialists early and identify alternatives to endotracheal intubation such as laryngeal mask airway, bougie-guided intubation, or other adjuncts. Before starting the procedure in any intubation, especially in an emergency setting, determine the “plan B” and “plan C” to be followed if initial attempts fail.

Evidence Appraisal

The Mallampati score was initially developed for the operating room setting. Multiple large studies involving tens of thousands of patients have shown a reliable association between a higher Mallampati class and difficult intubation.

Despite this, the Mallampati score does have its detractors. In a 2019 paper, Green and Roback argued that despite the high association seen with higher Mallampati class and difficult intubation, the sensitivity of the score is rather low, which is suboptimal for a screening test. They advocated for the use of the Mallampati score in the context of the total clinical picture. Furthermore, in the emergency setting, a patient with a failing airway or respiratory effort requiring intubation will still require intubation, regardless of the Mallampati score. Although a higher Mallampati score may prompt an earlier call to anesthesia or other specialties for assistance, its application in the emergent setting (emergency department, intensive care unit) may be limited, as the score was initially developed and has primarily been validated in the operating room setting.
Instructions
To use the modified Mallampati classification, position the patient seated upright and direct the patient to open mouth and protrude tongue fully.

Use the Calculator Now
Click here to access the Modified Mallampati Classification on MDCalc.

Calculator Creator
Seshagiri R. Mallampati, MD
Click here to read more about Dr. Mallampati.

References
Original/Primary Reference

Validation References

Additional References

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