

Imaging department

Sentinel lymph node injection and scan

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet has been provided to help answer some of the questions you or those who care for you may have about sentinel lymph node injection and scan. It is not meant to replace the consultation between you and your healthcare team, but aims to help you understand more about what you discussed together. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us using the contact details on page 3.

What is sentinel lymph node injection and scan?

You are due to have an operation to remove lymph nodes to test for cancer cells. To prepare for this surgery, you need a sentinel lymph node injection to help us identify which lymph nodes should be removed.

The scan involves injecting a small amount of a radioactive substance around the scar from your original skin lesion. This substance is then slowly taken up by the lymph glands.

During the operation itself, the surgeon will use a small piece of equipment called a 'gamma probe' to detect the signal given off by these lymph nodes and remove them.

What are the risks and benefits of having a sentinel lymph node injection and scan?

We do not expect any risks or side effects from the low-dose radioactive substance because the total amount of radiation that you receive is less than you would normally receive from the environment over a 12-day period.

Are there any alternatives to this scan?

The surgeons will use a blue dye substance during the operation to help identify lymph glands to sample. Using two different substances allows the surgeons to detect the first draining lymph gland (the sentinel lymph node) 95 per cent of the time – these are the most important to sample. Just using either the blue dye or the radioactive substance is not as effective.

Further information about the procedure

Day of surgery	Day of nuclear medicine scan	
Monday	Monday morning (same day)	Please attend the nuclear medicine department at Hammersmith Hospital . After the scan we will arrange for patient transport to take you to Charing Cross Hospital for your surgery. A member of our staff will escort you.
Wednesday	Tuesday	Please attend the nuclear medicine department at Hammersmith Hospital at the time given. After the scan you will be able to go home. Please do not shower or remove the dressing that has been placed over the injection site until after your surgery. You will need to be at 6 west ward at Charing Cross Hospital by 08.00 on the Wednesday morning for your surgery

Is there anything I need to do before my procedure?

If you are breast feeding we advise that you stop for 24 hours after the procedure. You may wish to express and store milk before the procedure.

Please fast for 6 hours before your admission time for surgery as you will need to have an empty stomach for your operation and anaesthesia.

What if I cannot keep my appointment?

Please contact us as soon as possible. We can then offer this date to another patient and agree a new appointment date and time with you. You will find the appropriate telephone number on your appointment letter.

How do I get to the hospital?

Please visit the Trust's website for more information about travelling to our hospitals:
www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations

What happens on the day of my procedure?

When you arrive at the nuclear medicine department at Hammersmith Hospital a member of staff will check your details and ask you to change into a hospital gown.

The technicians will apply a local anaesthetic cream to the area where your skin lesion was removed and leave this on for half an hour to help numb the area.

A radiologist will then explain the procedure to you. While you are lying on the scanner table the radiologist will place up to 6 small injections of a radioactive substance into and around the scar where the skin lesion was removed.

After the injections we will ask you to lie on your back on the scanner table and we will start the first scan. After approximately half an hour of imaging a further scan, called a SPECT-CT, will be carried out. This involves a short low-dose CT scan and is performed using the same scanner.

Once the imaging has finished the radiologist will mark a site on the skin with a marker pen and place a clear dressing over it. The surgeons will be able to see this mark at the time of surgery.

Is there anything I need to watch out for at home?

As this scan only involves a small amount of radiation you can return to your normal activities afterwards.

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or concerns:

- Nuclear medicine, Hammersmith Hospital: 020 3313 3115
- 6 west ward, Charing Cross Hospital: 020 3313 2517
- Macmillan navigators: 020 3313 0303

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM

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