

Sentinel Node Biopsy

What is a Lymph Node?

A lymph node is a small filter that cleans your body fluids. It “captures” dead cells, bacteria (germs) or even cancer cells. There are white blood cells in the lymph node whose “job” is to destroy anything abnormal the node filters out.

What is a Sentinel Node Biopsy?

The sentinel node is the name given to the first lymph node that drains the area of your body that has the cancer. If cancer cells have started to break off from the original cancer, the sentinel node would filter them.

A sentinel lymph node biopsy is the removal of the sentinel lymph node (the biopsy) to see if there are cancer cells in it. If there are cancer cells found in the sentinel node, the doctor will remove more lymph nodes to see if they are affected, too. Your doctors can use this information to plan your treatment.

What Happens During a Sentinel Node Biopsy?

- A technologist will inject a small amount of radioactive tracer into the area around the cancer.
- He or she may take a scan of the area. You will not feel any discomfort.
- You will be taken to a private waiting area. You will wait there until it is time for your surgery. (Your family may wait there with you.)
- Right before surgery, you will be given a medicine to put you asleep.

Your Appointment

Location: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____ a.m. / p.m.

Register at: _____

at _____ a.m. / p.m.

For more information call:

- The surgeon will inject a blue dye into the area near your cancer. This dye goes to the sentinel node and turns it blue.
- He or she can easily find the sentinel node using a small Geiger counter and looking for the blue area.
- The surgeon will remove the sentinel node and send it to the lab.
- At the lab, a pathologist will look to see if there are any cancer cells.
 - If there are no cancer cells, the surgeon will finish the surgery.
 - If there are cancer cells found, the surgeon will remove some more lymph nodes to check for the presence of cancer cells.

(over)

- Special tests will be done on the sentinel node in the lab. Your surgeon will give you the results of these tests in a few days.

Are There Benefits of Sentinel Node Biopsy?

If there are no cancer cells in the sentinel node, you may not need to have any other lymph nodes removed.

What Are the Risks of a Sentinel Node Biopsy?

There is a small risk if you have an allergy to the blue dye. If you have a reaction to the dye (which is rare), you will be treated right away. Because the dye is given during surgery, the surgeon will be there with you.

What Else Should You Know?

- You may have a slightly bluish tint in your skin over the place the dye was injected. You may also have blue- or green-tinged urine or stools for a few days after the procedure. This is harmless and will go away.
- The less surgery you have, the lower your risk of one day getting lymphedema. Lymphedema is the swelling of body tissue that can be caused by tissue damage or lymph node removal. See “How to Reduce the Risk of Lymphedema After Lymph Node Biopsy or Surgery,” pt-ah-11172, to learn more about lymphedema.