

Information and Preparation

Sentinel Lymph Node Injection (Breast)

Description

This is a diagnostic test which uses a radioactive dye to identify the lymph nodes in your body nearest your tumour. The test involves an injection of this dye. You may have this done on the day of your operation, or the day before. The dye is only available on certain days, which will determine if you are seen the day before or the day of your surgery. Your surgeon will discuss this with you, and they will decide when you need to attend.

If you would like to speak to a member of the nuclear medicine team before your appointment, please call us on the number provided at the end of the information.

Injection the day before surgery

You will make your own way to the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the appointment time given to you by the Nuclear Medicine Team. The appointment will take approx. 15 minutes. You may attend the appointment by yourself or bring someone with you.

Injection on the same day as surgery

The surgical scheduling team will arrange with you the date, time and location of where you need to be for your surgery. This will include information on when you need to stop eating and drinking and any advice on medication. Please follow these instructions.

Once you have been admitted, Nuclear Medicine will call the ward you are on, and a porter will bring you down to Nuclear Medicine. The appointment will take approx. 15 minutes. Nuclear Medicine will then call a porter to take you back to your ward, where you will wait for your surgery.

Preparation

There is no special preparation for this test. However, please follow any instructions given from the surgical team.

- **If you are pregnant or breastfeeding**

for all Nuclear Medicine studies, patients aged between 11-55, will have their pregnancy and breastfeeding status checked.

Radiation can be harmful for an unborn baby. If you are, or think you may be, pregnant, you must tell us as soon as possible, ideally before attending your appointment.

Radioactive dyes can be passed into breast milk. Please tell us before you come for your test if you are breastfeeding and we can advise you whether you will need to stop for any amount of time

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Injection

A member of the Nuclear Medicine team will inject a small amount of a radioactive dye into the area close to your nipple, just under the surface of the skin. The dose of radioactivity is very low, and the needle is very small. The injection takes around 15 – 20 seconds to administer. You will then leave the department.

This radioactive dye will not make you feel any different. You should not feel sick or drowsy after the injection or in the weeks afterward and it will not affect your ability to drive a car.

The radioactive dye will travel along your lymphatic system and reach the sentinel node under your arm. When in surgery, the surgeons will use a special probe to find this radioactive dye and the sentinel node it is in. This lymph node will be sent to the lab for further testing.

Results

The outcome of your surgery will be discussed with you on your next review appointment.

What are the risks and benefits from the radiation?

You receive a small radiation dose from the radioactivity in the injection when having a sentinel node study. The radiation dose is equivalent to the amount received from natural sources of radiation in about two months. The risks from the radiation are minimal and there are no obvious side effects from having this injection.

The radiation dose to other people around you is very low and you do not need to keep away from anyone if you are having this procedure.

The Benefits of this test are to enable the surgeons to identify your sentinel lymph node.

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