

Nuclear medicine department

# Information about your sentinel node scan

## What is a sentinel node scan?

A sentinel node scan is used to identify sentinel lymph nodes. These are the first lymph nodes to receive the lymphatic fluid from a particular area of the body. The scan is carried out in preparation for your sentinel lymph node biopsy later on the same day or the following day. A tiny amount of a radioactive substance called a tracer will be injected into the skin around the primary site of the cancer. You are then positioned under a scanner called a gamma camera. The tracer moves from this primary site through the lymph vessels to the lymph nodes. The positions of the sentinel nodes will be marked on the skin surface. This identifies those nodes which your surgeon may want to remove.

## Is there any preparation for my scan?

- Please continue to eat and drink normally and continue to take your usual medication unless you have been asked not to eat because of your surgery.
- Please allow plenty of time to get to your appointment, as the tracer is individually ordered for you and scans cannot normally be delayed.
- Please do not bring along anyone who is pregnant or under 18 years of age.
- **You must tell us in advance if you know you are (or think that you may be) pregnant, or are breastfeeding.**

## What happens during the scan?

Our staff will explain the procedure to you fully when you arrive for your appointment.

- Just before the scan begins we will ask you to empty your bladder. You will be asked to change into a hospital gown.
- We will then ask you to lie on the scan bed. We will make sure you are as comfortable as possible for the scan, as it is extremely important that you remain as still as you can.
- While you are lying on the bed we will inject a very small amount of the tracer into the skin, in three or four places, around the site of the cancer.
- You will then be positioned under the scanner and we will take the first pictures for up to 30 minutes. Following that we will take several more pictures, from the front and the side, each taking five minutes.



- When we have seen the sentinel node/s, we will mark the position on your skin with a permanent pen.
- Most scans take about one hour, but if we have not seen the node/s, you may be asked to return later in the day for further pictures to be taken.

### **Will I feel anything during the scan?**

Having the injection will sting momentarily, but there are no side effects from the injection and it will not make you feel sleepy or affect your ability to drive.

Having the pictures taken will not hurt, but if you are in a lot of pain or find it difficult to keep still, please tell us.

### **What happens after the scan?**

When we have checked the technical quality of your scan and are happy we have all the information we need, you will be able to leave the department.

After the scan is reported, the results will be sent to your surgeon before you have the operation.

### **How safe is the examination?**

There are small risks associated with the radioactive tracer that you have been given. However, the images give the surgeons important information that helps in your treatment. The benefits of the information from the test outweigh the small risks of exposure to radiation. As is possible with all medication, a small number of people may be allergic to the injection, although this is very rare. Please tell the staff attending to you if you have any allergies, or if you had any previous reactions from this test.

### **What are the benefits of the scan?**

The sentinel node scan is only one part of the procedure called sentinel lymph node biopsy, which is a surgical technique for finding out how far some types of cancer have spread (staging). It helps the surgeon looking after you to identify and locate those nodes which they may want to remove.

Your specialist surgeon will already have discussed with you the benefits of having a sentinel node scan.

### **What happens if I decide not to have the scan?**

If you decide not to have the scan, then please discuss this with the surgeon who is looking after you.

### **What happens if I cannot keep my appointment?**

If you cannot keep your appointment, please contact the nuclear medicine department as soon as possible. The scan must be carried out shortly before your operation.

**Please attend promptly at the time shown on the attached appointment letter.**

**If you have any questions about this appointment, or any queries about the examination, please phone the number below:**

**Tel: 0161 446 3942/6**



If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

