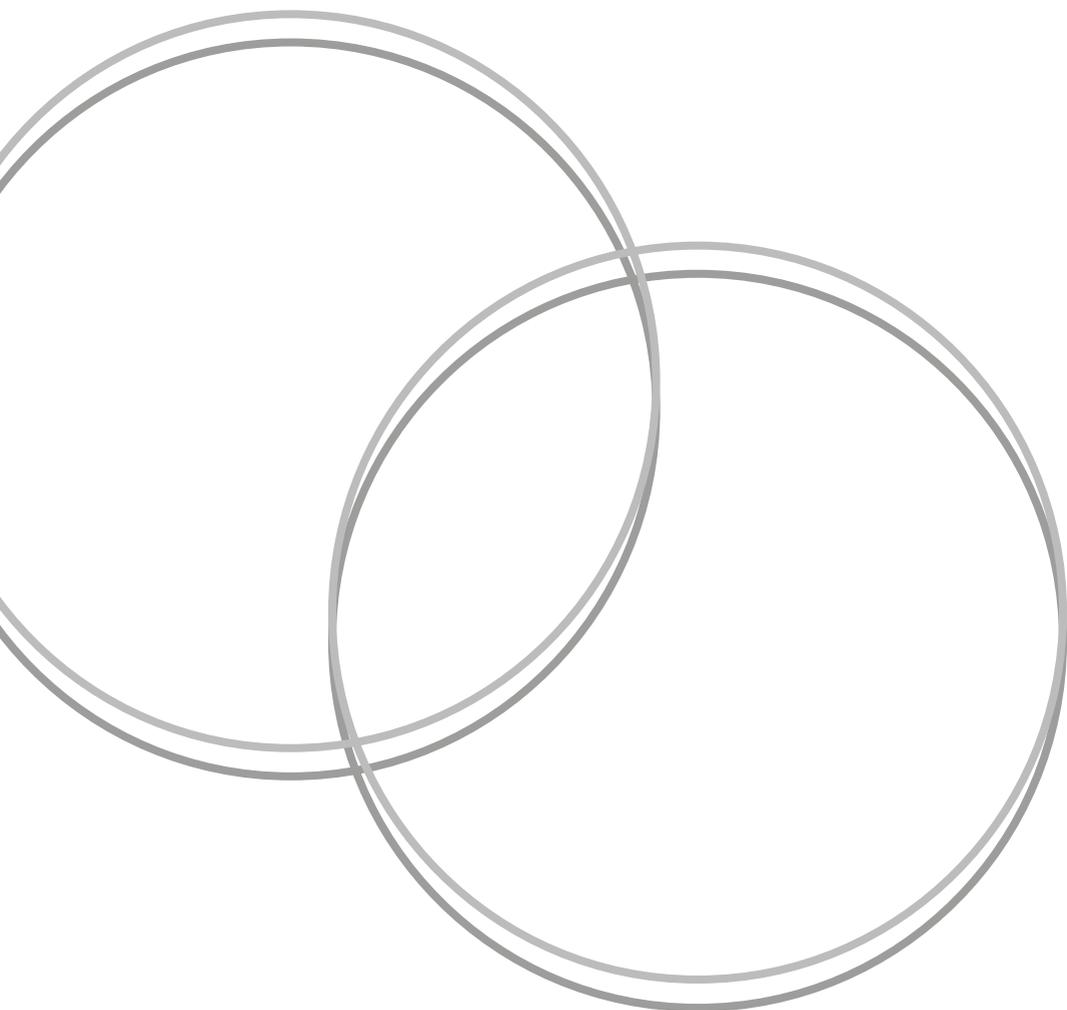


Head and Neck Urgent Suspected Cancer Referral: Possible Investigations

Information for patients



Why have I been referred?

Your GP has referred you on an Urgent Suspected Cancer Referral pathway because they are concerned about a mouth, throat, neck, ear or nose problem. This is a rapid referral to look for or exclude a cancer.

Who might I meet?

Your initial appointment will be with an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) or Maxillofacial surgeon.

What next?

As part of the investigation process you may be referred for further tests such as an ultrasound scan (with/without a biopsy), CT scan, MRI scan, biopsy of your mouth under local anaesthetic or a PET CT scan. You may also need an examination and biopsy under a short general anaesthetic. Sometimes we will book these tests at the time of meeting you in clinic, so will be able to explain these to you. However, we will also book the next best test to investigate the problem you presented to us with as quickly as possible, this means they are likely to occur in the next 14 to 28 days. Therefore, please attend any tests even if they haven't been discussed with you whilst we are working to find a likely diagnosis, and we will feed back the results to you as soon as possible. We relay results to you often via letter, sometimes by telephone or at a clinic appointment.

What is an ultrasound guided biopsy of the neck?

It is a simple, quick and effective procedure to take a tissue sample of your neck lump, including the thyroid gland.

Ultrasound (high frequency sound waves) is used to create an image of your neck. The image is then used to guide a fine needle through the skin into the right place within your neck and collect small pieces of tissue. The tissue is sent to the laboratory to be examined under the microscope.

What should I do to prepare for the procedure?

Unless we have told you otherwise, take any regular medication you may be taking.

If you are on anticoagulant medication (blood thinners) this may need to stop in advance of the test it is important to discuss this with your GP/referring clinician.

Please see guidance below

- Aspirin and Clopidogrel: Stop 7 days before.
- Warfarin: Stop 5 days before.
- Apixaban, Rivaroxaban, Dabigatran: Stop 48 hours before.

What happens after the procedure?

After the neck biopsy you can go straight home. You can eat and drink as normal. We advise you to avoid vigorous physical activity for 24 hours after the biopsy. Most people are comfortable enough to go back to work the same day or the next day after this procedure. We will give you an information sheet to take home with you.

How about the results?

The results of your neck biopsy may be available a week later, but for some cases this can take longer and we will see you in clinic with the results. If the results suggest that another medical team should see you then this referral may be made before the results are discussed with you. This is to avoid delays in your treatment.

For neck lumps the biopsy will provide a diagnosis in about 9 out of every 10 patients.

MRI

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a medical imaging technique used to create detailed pictures of the inside of the body. It uses a powerful magnetic field, radio waves, and a computer to produce images that can help doctors diagnose and treat a variety of medical conditions. MRI is a non-invasive procedure and does not use any ionizing radiation, making it a very safe exam.

During an MRI, you would lie on a table that slides into a large cylindrical magnet. The magnet creates a strong magnetic field that aligns the protons in the body's atoms. The MRI then sends radio waves through the body, which cause the protons to emit signals that are detected by the machine. The computer processes these signals and creates detailed images of the body's internal structures.

It is particularly useful for imaging soft tissues such as muscles, tendons, and ligaments, which are not visible on X-rays. MRI can also provide information about blood flow and help detect abnormalities such as tumours, infections, and inflammation.

Before an MRI, you will be asked to remove any metal objects, including jewellery, watches, and clothing with metal fasteners. You need to fill out a questionnaire to ensure that you do not have any medical conditions or devices that could be affected by the strong magnetic field. During the MRI, you will need to lie still and in some instances may be asked to hold your breath briefly to minimize movement that could affect the image quality.

MRI is a safe and effective way to visualize the internal structures of the body and diagnose a wide range of medical conditions. The radiology department will provide you with specific instructions to prepare for the procedure and answer any questions you may have.

CT

A CT scan is a type of scan which uses X-rays linked to a sophisticated computer to create detailed pictures of your body in 'slice sections' (cross sections). The CT scanner is an open ring-like structure, which looks a bit like a giant doughnut, rather than a tunnel as everybody expects!

You may eat and drink normally on the day of the scan up until 2 hours before the scan, you will need to fast (have nothing to eat) for two hours before the appointment time, so that there is not too much bowel gas on the images, you may only drink water in the 2 hours before your scan. This also helps to prevent you from feeling sick if we give you a contrast injection during the scan.

The actual scan only takes a minute or two, but the preparation takes longer. You may be in the scan room for up to 15 minutes but should allow approximately an hour from the start of your appointment before you will be ready to go home.

For the majority of scans, we will give an injection of contrast dye. This will help to show up your blood vessels and body organs on the scan pictures. If you are having an injection of contrast dye, a cannula (small plastic tube) will be inserted into a vein in your arm. We use this to give you the injection of contrast dye during the procedure. The cannula will either be put in when you are in the preparation area or later, when you go into the scan room. You will be told about what to expect if you are having the injection of X-ray contrast dye. This is usually a metallic taste in the mouth and a warm sensation throughout the body, particularly in the pelvis, which lasts for about 30 seconds.

During the scan you will be asked to lie on your back or your front on the scan table, depending on which area of your body we need to scan. The scanning table will move your body through the scanner, so that the areas we need to look at can be scanned. You may be asked to hold your breath while the scanner takes the pictures. If you have difficulty holding your breath, please tell us.

The scan itself should not be painful. The Radiographer who carries out the scan and the Radiology assistant can see and hear you at all times through a connecting window and an intercom.

You can leave soon after the scan and continue with your normal daily activities. If you had X-ray contrast dye as part of the scan, you will be asked to remain in the department for up to 20 minutes, because some people may develop a delayed allergic reaction to the dye. If this does occur, we will treat you in the Radiology department.

After the scan you can eat and drink as you would normally but if you have an injection of contrast, you may be advised to slightly increase your fluid intake for the rest of the day. If you are diabetic and taking metformin, we will speak to you about whether you need to stop taking this medication for 48 hours after the scan and visiting your GP for a blood test.

PET /CT

PET/CT stands for Positron Emission Tomography. This is an imaging technique that uses a scanner to detect radioactivity levels in your body following an injection of a small quantity of a radioactive tracer, usually ¹⁸Fluorodeoxyglucose (similar to sugar), which produces images to show how your body is working. CT (Computed Tomography) uses X-rays to produce cross-section pictures showing the density of organs in the body. By combining these two techniques in one scanner, we are able to provide important information to help your doctor plan appropriate treatment for you.

You will not be able to eat or drink anything except for water for 6 hours before your appointment, we do encourage you to drink plenty of water before and after you scan to flush the tracer through your body. You will need to avoid strenuous exercise for 24 hours before your scan.

When you arrive for your appointment, you will be taken into the department and the radioactive injection, which behaves in the body like glucose (sugar), will be administered, there are no side effects from the injection, and it will not make you feel any different. You will then be asked to sit quietly for 1 to 2hrs depending on the scan, whilst the injection is absorbed into your body. During this time, you can read, watch a DVD, listen to music, and drink some water. You will however be on your own for this time as you are radioactive and we wish to protect your friends and family, and the staff.

Following the injection and waiting time, you will be taken for the scan which will take between 30 to 60 minutes depending on your height and type of scan. After the scan you can leave immediately but you will remain radioactive for several hours and therefore should not attend the scan with, and avoid contact for 6 hours after the scan, with children or anybody who might be pregnant.

Biopsy under general anaesthetic

This involves a pre-operative assessment with a nurse and sometimes an anaesthetist as an outpatient appointment. This may involve blood tests and an ECG (heart tracing).

You will then be given a date for surgery

This involves coming to hospital on the day of surgery and spending most of the day in the hospital. You will need someone to bring you and collect you, and an adult to look after you overnight. Please let us know if you would need help with this.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Blenheim Head and Neck outpatient department in the Churchill Hospital

Telephone: 01865 223 556

ENT in the John Radcliffe Hospital

Telephone: 01865 231 062

Maxillofacial Department in the John Radcliffe Hospital

Telephone: 01865 743 112

Further information

More patient information is available on the following websites:

www.impactscan.org/patientguide

www.ouh.nhs.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/head-and-neck-cancer

www.entuk.org/patients/conditions

[www.baoms.org.uk/patients/what is oral maxillofacial surgery.aspx](http://www.baoms.org.uk/patients/what_is_oral_maxillofacial_surgery.aspx)

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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