



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Sentinel node scan for melanoma

Department of Nuclear Medicine

Patient information

What is a sentinel node scan for melanoma?

The sentinel lymph node scan is a scan to identify the first few lymph nodes into which a tumour drains. These are called sentinel nodes.

The scan is done by injecting two to four times around the excision scar with a radioactive substance. Imaging is then performed to show the lymph nodes that contain the radioactive substance. The scan does not show if the tumour has spread into the nodes. It shows only the location of the sentinel nodes.

Can I have a sentinel node scan if I am pregnant?

If there is a possibility that you are pregnant, please inform the department before your appointment, as your appointment may need to be postponed.

Can I have a sentinel node scan if I am breastfeeding or chest/bottle-feeding?

Please inform the department before your appointment if you are currently breastfeeding or bottle feeding your breastmilk to your child, as you may need to pause for a few hours. If you are currently chestfeeding or bottle feeding your child formula milk, please inform the department before your appointment.

Can I have a Sentinel Node scan if I am on dialysis?

Please inform the department if you are on any form of dialysis, as it may be necessary to co-ordinate your nuclear medicine appointment with your dialysis treatment.

Can I bring someone with me?

Whenever possible, you should attend your appointment alone, unless you need a carer to support any additional needs. If you need a carer, or you provide care for someone else involving close contact, please inform the department before your appointment, as you may need to keep a distance of 1 metre from them for a few hours.

How long will my appointment take?

Please allow 3 hours for your appointment.

What will happen at my appointment?

Before the examination, a cream is applied to numb the skin around your scar and left for approximately half an hour.

Then you will be asked to change into a gown and remove any metallic objects such as a bra, phone, belt or keys.

The numbing cream will be removed, and you will be taken to the scanning room and given the injections of the radioactive substance around your scar. It emits gamma rays which will be detected by a piece of equipment called a gamma camera.

You will then be asked to lie down on a table. We position the scanner around you and take images that allow the location of sentinel nodes to be identified. Occasionally images may be repeated or extra images obtained if necessary. All images will be checked before you leave the department.

What happens after my appointment?

To protect other people from radiation, plan to keep a distance of at least 1 metre for a few hours. This is long enough for some of the radioactivity to decay and for your body to remove the rest. Brief close contact such as queuing or walking past others is safe. Remember to use good hygiene precautions during this time to prevent contamination.

Eat as normal and keep well hydrated, but please remember to follow the instructions for your surgery.

The results of your scan will be made available to your surgeon in time for your surgery.

Are there any risks with this procedure?

The radioactive tracer administered will expose you to a small amount of ionising radiation, consistent with the desired diagnostic outcome.

The risks are very low and the benefits of having the results from the Sentinel node scan greatly outweigh the risk.

Contact details

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