

Sentinel lymph node scintigraphy for melanoma

Purpose of the study

This study locates the lymph node that lymphatic vessels drain into from the area of a lesion. This lymph node is called the sentinel lymph node. The sentinel lymph node's location will be marked on your skin with a pen so that the surgeon will find it more easily when you have surgery.

A marked sentinel lymph node could be healthy or diseased. We will not know if cancer has spread to the sentinel lymph node until the surgeon and the pathologist have examined it.

Preparing for the study

- No preparation is necessary for the nuclear medicine study.
- Follow the instructions you received for the surgery.

What to expect at the study

You will receive a small amount of radioactive tracer, which the doctor will inject into your skin around the area of change or scar. The injections are made in 2-4 places. The tracer will find its way into the lymphatic system and travel along them to the nearest lymph nodes. You will not feel the tracer in your body.

The scan begins shortly after you have received the injections. Local images are taken from 2-3 different directions of the lymph node area closest to the melanoma, usually in the armpit or groin area, and the locations of the sentinel lymph nodes are marked on the skin with a marker. The scan takes about half an hour and you must lie still on your back.

Once the scan is complete, you will receive the necessary papers from the Nuclear Medicine Unit.

After the study

After the study, you go to the surgical ward where you will wait for your surgery. If the procedure will not take place until the following day, you can go home for the night. In that case, avoid holding young children or being in close proximity to them for more than half an hour.

You can bathe normally, but be careful not to rub off the marks on your skin.

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