

# Lymphoscintigraphy for Skin Cancers

## About your scan

*This handout explains how lymphoscintigraphy for skin cancer works, how it is done, what to expect, and how to get your results.*



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### What is lymphoscintigraphy?

*Lymphoscintigraphy* is a scan that finds the first lymph node that a cancer site drains to. This is called a *sentinel* node. To find this node, a radioactive *tracer* (X-ray dye) is injected near the cancer site. The tracer flows from the injection site into the sentinel node.

**Your lymphoscintigraphy will be done right before your surgery.** During surgery, your surgeon will remove this sentinel node and send it to the lab. The lab's *biopsy* report will tell us if any of the tumor cells have *metastasized* (spread) to the sentinel node.

### How do I prepare?

- You will need to apply EMLA cream to the area at least 1 hour before your scan. This will numb the area. EMLA cream has 2.5% lidocaine and 2.5% prilocaine. Your surgeon will give you a prescription for this cream.
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* Tell your provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

### Where do I check in?

#### If Your Surgery Is at UWMC - Montlake

Check in at the Surgical Specialties Center in the Surgery Pavilion at the east end of the hospital.

We will ask you to change into a hospital gown. A staff person will then take you to the Radiology (Imaging Services) department.



*A gamma camera will hover above you during your scan.*

## If Your Surgery Is at UWMC - Northwest

Please ask your surgeon's scheduling nurse where to check in.

## How is the scan done?

- *If you were assigned female at birth:* **Before** we begin, tell the doctor if there is any chance you could be pregnant.
- A nuclear medicine doctor will clean your skin with an antiseptic called ChloroPrep.
- The doctor will then give you up to 4 injections of the tracer around the skin cancer. Your lymph nodes around the skin cancer will take up the tracer, usually within minutes.
- We may gently massage the area. This will help ease any discomfort from the injection and will also help the flow of lymph fluid.
- The tracer will drain into the lymph system and collect in the sentinel node. This does not mean there is cancer in that node. It just shows the node with the highest risk of getting cancer, since it is the one that the tissue drains to first.
- For the scan, we will ask you to lie on your back. A *gamma camera* will hover above you and take images. When the sentinel node is found, your doctor will use a surgical pen to mark on your skin where that node is.
- If your skin cancer is in your head or neck area, you will likely also have 3D imaging with a low-dose CT scan (SPECT/CT). This scan will help find the exact location of the sentinel node. This extra imaging will take about 15 minutes.

## What happens during the surgery?

During the surgery, your surgeon will find the sentinel node using a hand-held device that detects radiation. Your surgeon will then take a tissue sample from the sentinel node to be biopsied in the lab. These lab tests will show if there is cancer in the lymph node.

## What will I feel before and during the scan?

You may feel some discomfort from the injections. We may ask you to change positions as the images are taken.

## After the Scan

- After your scan, you will be taken to the location where your surgery will be done.
- There are no other special instructions to follow after the scan.

## Who reviews the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist or nuclear medicine doctor will review your scans. This doctor will also review the other scan results that you may have brought with you and then share their findings with the provider who referred you. Your own provider will then talk with you about the results.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC Nuclear  
Medicine/Imaging  
Services: 206.598.6200
- Harborview Nuclear  
Medicine: 206.744.4473
- UWMC - Northwest  
Imaging Services:  
206.598.4240