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Ultrasound Guided FNA Thyroid Imaging Department



Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net. If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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Are there any risks in having a Thyroid FNA?

There is a very small risk of developing a bruise on the skin or small bleed at the site of the FNA. This does not normally require any treatment at all.

Whenever there is a break in the skin there is always a small risk of infection, the procedure is performed with sterile equipment and aseptic technique to reduce the risk.

Overall, thyroid FNA is considered to be a very safe procedure.

Ultrasound Guided Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA) of Thyroid Nodules

What is a thyroid nodule?

The thyroid is a butterfly shaped gland in the neck that produces thyroid hormones important for various functions.

Nodules in the thyroid are very common in adults, thought to be present in up to 60% of people and often not causing symptoms.

Most nodules are harmless (benign) however a very small proportion, around 4-6% can contain malignant cells (cancerous).

What is fine needle aspiration?

Fine needle aspiration uses a very small needle to obtain a small number of cells from your thyroid. The cells can then be examined under a microscope so that together we can understand more about your thyroid nodule.

Many nodules do not require FNA however where ultrasound detects certain appearances, as a precaution an FNA will be recommended to understand more about your nodule. This will enable your referring Doctor to determine whether this is a benign [non-cancerous] nodule or if there could be any risk for potential malignant [cancerous] nodule.

Preparing for ultrasound guided FNA

There is no specific preparation necessary.

Please inform the Radiologist or Sonographer if you are taking any medication used to thin the blood, such as aspirin or warfarin.

How is the procedure performed?

A specialist will perform the FNA after obtaining your consent and addressing any questions you have about the test.

A Radiography Department assistant [RDA] or nurse will also be present during the procedure.

The Thyroid will be scanned to locate the abnormal area.

The neck will be cleansed with antiseptic. Lidocaine [local anesthetic] to numb the area may or may not be used. An ultrasound transducer with a small amount of sterile water-soluble gel will be placed on your neck over the thyroid nodule. The radiologist / sonographer will insert a small needle through the skin using the ultrasound scan in real time to guide the needle to the nodule. After the sample is taken, the needle will be removed. Commonly an additional sample is taken to ensure there are enough cells to examine.

The needle will then be removed, and some light pressure applied to the neck to reduce bruising.

A small plaster will be applied, let nurse or specialist know if you have a plaster allergy.

The process takes 20 - 30 minutes although the needle is only in the thyroid for approximately 10 - 20 seconds.

What happens after the FNA?

Both the radiology report, and the result of the FNA analysis from the pathology lab, will be sent to your referring doctor. You will need to make an appointment to see your referring doctor to discuss the results. You should allow 7 working days for the pathology report to be available.

What will I experience during and after the procedure?

You may feel some pressure on your neck from the ultrasound transducer and mild discomfort as the needle is moved to obtain the cells.

You will be asked to remain still and not to cough, talk, swallow, or make a sound during the procedure.

You can resume normal activities and any bandage can be removed within a few hours.

The biopsy site may be tender for one to two days. You may take non-prescription pain medicine to relieve any discomfort.