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## Sentinel Lymph Node Scan and Biopsy of the Breast

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There are 2 steps to this procedure:

1. On the day before surgery **or** the day of surgery you will go to the Nuclear Medicine Department to have a scan done to locate the sentinel lymph node(s).

**Your Appointment for the Sentinel Node Scan is:**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location: Nuclear Medicine  
Level 0, Marian Wing, Charlton Campus**

2. You then go the Day Surgery Unit to prepare for surgery.

**Your Appointment for the Day Surgery Unit is:**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location: Day Surgery Unit  
Level 2, Surgical Centre, Charlton Campus**

### What is a sentinel lymph node?

Each breast and the tissue around the breast contain lymph nodes. Lymph nodes collect and drain fluid. There are also lymph nodes all over the body.

When you have breast cancer, cells from the tumour may escape and move into the lymph nodes. The first node(s) into which the tumor drains are called the **sentinel lymph node(s)**. The lymph node(s) that receives drainage from the breast would be the first site affected if the tumour from the breast has spread. There may be one or more lymph nodes affected.

### What is a sentinel lymph node biopsy?

This is a procedure that removes 1 or more lymph nodes to see if they contain cancer cells. A special doctor examines the cells to see if they contain cancer.

Before the sentinel node biopsy is done you will have a **lymph node scan**.

### What will happen?

1. On the day before surgery **or** the day of surgery you will go to the **Nuclear Medicine Department** to have your scan. You will change into a gown and lie on a stretcher. A small amount of a radioactive liquid will be injected into the breast by the Nuclear Medicine Technologist. You will have about 4 injections. This may cause some discomfort but this will go away in a couple of minutes.

The technologist uses a large machine with a camera to take a picture to highlight the radioactive injections.

The whole procedure takes about 15 minutes. If your surgery is the next day you can go home after this procedure. If your surgery is the same day you will then go to the Day Surgery Unit.

2. You will go to the **Day Surgery Unit** on your scheduled date for surgery.

In the Day Surgery Unit, you will get ready for surgery. When you go into the operating room, the surgeon may inject a blue dye into the breast. This dye travels through the breast to the sentinel node(s). The surgeon locates the sentinel node(s) then makes a small incision under your arm. The surgeon removes the sentinel node(s). Tissue samples are sent to the laboratory to be examined for cancer cells. Allergic reactions to the dye are extremely rare.

### What happens after surgery?

You may have some pain or discomfort at the incision. You will be given pain control medication to help.

The blue dye will turn your urine green for about 24 hours.

The skin of your breast may also be a greyish colour for a while after the procedure. This usually goes away in time.

You may notice some swelling in the area of the incision or armpit after surgery.

### How long will I be in the hospital?

Most women go home a few hours after surgery.

**How do I take care of my incision?**

Your incision will be covered with white tape strips called steri-strips and a gauze bandage will be over these. You can remove the gauze bandage after 48 hours. Do not remove the steri-strips along the incision. Let these fall off when they are ready to come off. After 48 hours, you can shower and gently pat the area dry.

If another type of dressing is used, your surgeon or nurse will give you instructions on how to take care of yourself after surgery before you go home.

**When do I get the results?**

The results are sent to your surgeon in about 10 business days.

These results are reviewed with you at your first post-operative appointment. Further surgery or treatment may be necessary depending on the results.

**When do I see my surgeon again?**

You should have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon within 2 to 3 weeks. Call for an appointment if you have not been given one.