



University
Hospitals Sussex
NHS Foundation Trust

Sentinel node scan (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 or breastfeeding?

If there is a possibility that you are pregnant or if you are currently breastfeeding please inform the department before your appointment as we will likely have to re-schedule.

Can I bring someone with me?

Whenever possible, you should attend your appointment alone, unless you need a carer to support any additional needs.

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 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?

After the appointment you can resume all usual activities. Eat as normal and keep well hydrated, but please remember to follow the instructions for your surgery.

If you have young children or pregnant friends/family please limit close contact with them for the rest of the day. You can be in the same room but avoid sitting close to each other for long periods. This is to avoid them receiving any unnecessary radiation exposure.

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

Royal Sussex County Hospital (RSCH)

Nuclear Medicine Department

Louisa Martindale Building

Royal Sussex County Hospital

Eastern Road, Brighton BN2 5BE

Telephone: **01273 696955 Ext: 64381 or 64382**

**This leaflet is intended for patients receiving care
in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath**

Ref. number: 2024.1

Publication date: 03/2023

Review date: 03/2026

© University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust Disclaimer:
The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way
intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

