

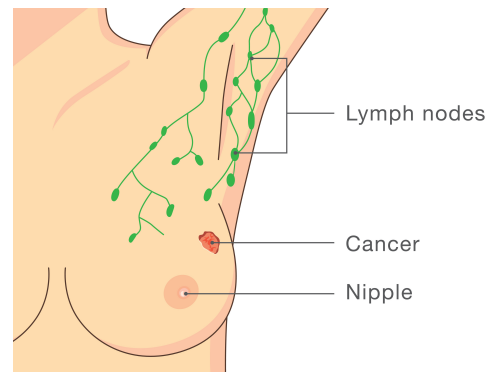
# LOCATING THE SENTINEL LYMPH NODE FOR BREAST CANCER SURGERY



If you are having lymph node surgery you may be asked to come into the clinic or hospital before your surgery for an injection or a tracer substance, which will make it easier to find your sentinel lymph node.

We test the sentinel lymph node to find out if cancer has spread outside of the breast. Breast cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes may be treated differently to breast cancer that has not spread to the lymph nodes.

Find out more about how to prepare for this procedure and what is involved on the day.



## Preparing to find the sentinel lymph node

The sentinel lymph node is the first lymph node that breast cancer is most likely to spread to. Sometimes there can be more than one lymph node involved. A sentinel node biopsy finds and removes these nodes so they can be tested for cancer cells.

Your surgeon may choose to isolate and find the sentinel lymph node by injecting either a blue dye, or a weakened radioactive substance, or magnetic substance that can be traced to the sentinel lymph node.

## What happens on the day of the procedure?

This is a simple procedure that you may have the day before your surgery or on the day of surgery a few hours before your operation. A small amount of fluid is injected into the tumour site or under the areola alongside the nipple. This injected fluid then drains from the breast and collects at the first lymph node(s) under your arm.

Plan for the procedure to take 30 minutes to one hour. It is fine to bring someone along to be with you for the procedure or you may ask them to drop you off and pick you up.

Bring a list of any medications you are taking, including any over-the-counter medications. You may be asked to stop taking some medications such as aspirin or other blood thinners prior to the procedure.

The type of injection and aftercare varies depending on the technique your surgeon recommends to identify the sentinel node:

- Blue dye
- Radioactive substance
- Magtrac system

## Blue dye

- A blue dye called methylene blue is injected in the area around the tumour.
- In a short amount of time the blue dye spreads around the injected area to the lymph nodes and lymph vessels and will stain some of your breast tissue blue.
- The first node(s) reached by the blue dye is the sentinel node.
- You may notice your urine and your faeces are a bluish or green colour for up to 24 hours after. This is normal and is just your body's way of getting rid of the dye.
- You will have a bluish patch on your breast for some time following the surgery. In some rare cases this discolouration may be permanent.
- There is a possibility of a mild allergic reaction to the dye in a very small amount of people, approximately 1-2%.

## Radioactive substance

- A small amount of mildly radioactive substance is injected into the breast around the area of the breast cancer.
- This injection is normally carried out in an x-ray department or the nuclear medicine department of the hospital. Ask your doctor or breast care nurse where to go.
- A hand-held detector is used during the breast cancer surgery to trace the path of the injected fluid to the lymph nodes needed.
- Not all centres in New Zealand offer this procedure and so you may have to travel to another hospital close to you the day before your surgery. Talk to your surgeon or breast care nurse about your options.

## Magtrac system

- In a few centres around the country a different type of tracer is used. This uses a magnetic system to locate the sentinel node(s).
- This Magtrac system uses an injection of small amount of fluid with tiny magnetic particles which flows into the sentinel lymph node and gets trapped there.
- A hand-held magnetic detector is then used to locate these nodes. If the injection is done the day before the operation you will be allowed to go home straight afterwards with a small dressing covering the injection site.

## Caring for yourself after the procedure

Once the procedure is complete, it's safe to go home and be with family. You'll have a small dry dressing placed over the injection site. If your breast feels tender and sore following the injection, it's okay to take some simple pain relief. Ask your doctor or nurse what pain relief they would suggest for you.



For more information

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