

Fine Needle Aspiration

What Is FNA?

Fine needle aspiration (FNA) is a technique that allows a biopsy of various bumps and lumps. It allows your otolaryngologist to retrieve enough tissue for microscopic analysis and thus make an accurate diagnosis of a number of problems, such as inflammation or even cancer.

FNA Is Used for Diagnosis In:

- Neck lymph nodes
- Neck cysts
- Parotid gland
- Thyroid gland
- Inside the mouth
- Any lump that can be felt

Why Is FNA Important?

A mass or lump sometimes indicates a serious problem, such as a growth or cancer*. While this is not always the case, the presence of a mass may require FNA for diagnosis. Your age, sex, and habits, such as smoking and drinking, are also important factors that help diagnosis of a mass. Symptoms of ear pain, increased difficulty swallowing, weight loss, or a history of familial thyroid disorder or of previous skin cancer (squamous cell carcinoma) may be important as well.

* When found early, most cancers in the head and neck can be cured with relatively little difficulty. Cure rates for these cancers are greatly improved if people seek medical advice as soon as possible. So play it safe. If you have a lump in your head and neck area, see your otolaryngologist right away.

What Are Some Areas That Can Be Biopsied In This Fashion?

FNA is generally used for diagnosis in areas such as the neck lymph nodes or for cysts in the neck. The parotid gland (the mumps gland), thyroid gland, and other areas inside the mouth or throat can be aspirated as well. Virtually any lump or bump that can be felt (palpated) can be biopsied using the FNA technique.

How Is FNA Done?

Your doctor will insert a small needle into the mass. Negative pressure is created in the syringe, and as a result of this pressure difference between the syringe and the mass, cellular material can be drawn into the syringe. The needle is moved in a to and fro fashion, obtaining enough material to make a diagnosis. This procedure is generally accurate and frequently prevents the patient from having an open, surgical biopsy, which is more painful and costly. The procedure generally does not require anesthesia. It is about as painful as drawing blood from the arm for laboratory testing (venipuncture). In fact, the needle used for FNA is smaller than that used for venipuncture. Although not painless, any discomfort associated with FNA is usually minimal.

What Are The Complications Of The FNA Procedure?

No medical procedure is without risks. Due to the small size of the needle, the chance of spreading a cancer or finding cancer in the needle path is very small. Other complications are rare; the most common is bleeding. If bleeding occurs at all, it is generally seen as a small bruise. Patients who take aspirin, Advil®, or blood thinners, such as Coumadin®, are more at risk to bleed. However, the risk is minimal. Infection is rarely seen.