

Ultrasound guided axilla (under arm) core biopsy

Radiology Department
Tel: 01271 370217

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net.

What is an axilla core biopsy?

An axilla core biopsy is a test whereby some small samples of tissue are taken from your axilla ((**under arm**)). The pathologist then examines these to try to help diagnose the problem.

Why is it needed?

Your mammogram or ultrasound has shown an area in your axilla that needs further investigation. As this area cannot be felt, a more detailed look is necessary.

If only normal tissue is removed, an operation may be avoided. If abnormal tissue is found, an operation is usually necessary.

What does it involve?

You will be asked to lie on a couch for your ultrasound examination. Sound waves pass through your axilla and a computer picture is formed and we will identify the area of your axilla concerning us. A local anaesthetic will be injected into the area of your axilla to numb the surrounding skin and tissues – this may sting very slightly. A small cut will be made in the skin and a special biopsy needle will be inserted. Several samples of tissue will be taken.

The needle makes a loud clicking noise and may cause discomfort but you should feel no pain. We will demonstrate the noise the needle makes before the procedure so that it doesn't take you by surprise.

It is very important that you keep still for each sample. When the needle is taken out, we will press on the area for a short time and may apply a small dressing.

The test will take about 20 to 30 minutes. When the test is finished, we will ask you to remain in the department for 30 minutes following the local anaesthetic injection.

What preparations are needed?

Usually no preparation is needed.

If you are taking drugs to thin the blood such as warfarin, heparin or aspirin, or have a problem with your blood clotting, please inform us by telephone on 01271 370217, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. If you are taking warfarin, it is helpful to bring your most recent INR result with you.

How will I feel afterwards?

You may feel some discomfort in your axilla after the procedure. If so, you can take simple painkillers that you would normally take for a headache such as paracetamol. Drugs like aspirin might cause bleeding so are best avoided

Women may find it more comfortable to wear a soft bra during the day and at night until the discomfort settles. You may notice some bruising but this normally settles on its own. If your axilla becomes red and tender, please contact your GP as you may have an infection. Most patients can return to normal daily activity straight away although it is advisable to avoid any heavy lifting for 24 hours.

Are there any risks?

Like any medical test, no test is 100% accurate and complications can occur. Serious bruising or infection is unusual but possible after the test.

Very exceptionally, the chest wall may be punctured and injury to the deeper organs may occur. If this rare complication occurs, a partial collapse of the lungs is likely. However, there are facilities to treat this immediately in the unlikely event that it should happen.

Results

Once the core biopsy has been performed, the samples will be analysed and the results will be sent to the referring clinician; this is usually your hospital consultant.

Further information

For further information please contact the Radiology Department on 01271 370217, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website www.careopinion.org.uk.

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.royaldevon.nhs.uk

© Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.
www.royaldevon.nhs.uk/get-in-touch