

Fine Needle Aspiration FAQs

WHAT IS A FINE NEEDLE ASPIRATION (FNA) BIOPSY?

FNA biopsy is a procedure that involves placing a needle into a lump and removing a sample of cells or a small amount of tissue for a Pathologist to examine. The lump can be located anywhere on your body, but most commonly involves your thyroid gland, breast, skin, lymph or salivary glands.

To ensure that the exact location is being sampled, ultrasound or X-ray may be used for deeper lumps.

WHO CAN PERFORM THE FNA?

The biopsy can be performed by an experienced clinician such as a Doctor or Radiologist. A specialist Cytopathologist then examines the cells.

IS THE NEEDLE BIOPSY PAINFUL?

The procedure should be no more painful than having a blood sample taken.

DOES THE PROCEDURE PRODUCE SCARRING?

No. The needle used in a FNA is short and thin, leaving no scars. This is one advantage of this method.

DOES THE PROCEDURE REQUIRE AN ANAESTHETIC?

Anaesthetic is rarely required. However, under special circumstances a local anaesthetic may be used. You may safely drive home after such a procedure.

HOW LONG DOES THE FNA TAKE?

The procedure only takes a few seconds. You may, however, be in the clinic for 20 to 30 minutes if more than one biopsy has to be taken to obtain enough tissue for examination by the Pathologist.

ARE THERE COMPLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH FNA?

The test is relatively safe. Bruising or slight bleeding may occur around the collection site. If any problems arise following the biopsy, please see your referring Doctor.

WHAT DOES THE RESULT MEAN?

The FNA specimens are examined for any abnormalities like cancerous cells using a microscope. A lump or mass does not necessarily indicate the presence of cancer. The FNA procedure often reveals that a suspicious lump or mass is actually benign or cystic.

There are four categories of results:

- **Benign:** The lump or mass is not likely to spread to other areas of the body. There are no cancerous cells present.
- **Malignant:** The cells are cancerous. They have the potential to or have spread to other areas of the body.
- **Non-Diagnostic:** The results are unclear. A surgical biopsy may be required.
- **Suspicious or Atypical:** The cells seen have worrisome features but for various reasons are not conclusively benign or malignant. In this situation, your clinician may opt to either repeat the sample or closely observe the lump or mass.

WHEN ARE THE TEST RESULTS AVAILABLE?

An interim result may be available shortly after the procedure. The final result will be available in approximately 1-2 working days unless further tests are requested. The result will be given to you by your Doctor.

HOW DO I MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR FNA?

Your referring Doctor may make the booking on your behalf or may give you details of a radiology practice that you will need to contact. The analysis of your pathology specimen will be arranged by the radiology practice.