

Virtual Pulmonary Nodule Clinic

Information and advice for patients

Respiratory Medicine

What is a pulmonary nodule?

A pulmonary nodule is a roundish shaped area of shadowing in the lung, usually 3 centimetres or less in size. They usually do not cause any symptoms. They are often detected on a CT (computer tomography) scan, or less often on chest Xrays.

What causes pulmonary nodules?

Pulmonary nodules are common. They occur in approximately 1 in 4 (25%) people, 55–74 years of age who smoke or previously have smoked. They also occur less commonly in younger people, and in those who have never smoked. They are more common in people who have previously been infected by TB or have an underlying condition such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Why am I receiving this leaflet?

You are receiving this leaflet because you have been found to have a pulmonary nodule that now requires a period of surveillance.

Are pulmonary nodules cancerous?

Most pulmonary nodules are benign (non-cancerous). In a small minority of people, the nodule may be cancerous.

If I have a pulmonary nodule, what happens next?

If a pulmonary nodule is detected on a chest Xray, it may be necessary for you to have a CT scan to look at the nodule in more detail. If a pulmonary nodule is detected on your CT scan, you may be invited to be reviewed in our virtual pulmonary nodule clinic.

What happens in the virtual pulmonary nodule clinic?

Prior to the clinic, we may call you via telephone to gather some additional information regarding your medical background. In our clinic, your CT scan will be assessed by a radiologist (Xray and CT scan specialist) and a respiratory specialist. In some cases, the respiratory specialist will discuss your CT scan at a team meeting with other specialist doctors and nurses.

It may be necessary to have a repeat CT scan, to monitor for any growth of the nodule. Benign (non-cancerous) nodules grow very slowly, or not at all. Malignant (cancerous) nodules will eventually grow but may also grow slowly.

When will my next CT scan be?

A repeat CT scan will be arranged from 3 months to 12 months after your first CT scan, depending on advice from the respiratory specialist team.

How will I know my results?

Our respiratory specialist team will contact you with the results via a letter, it is expected that you will receive this information within 4 weeks of your CT scan.

If your nodule has grown in size, we will arrange a face to face clinic to discuss results and plan further management.

If your nodule stays the same size, you may not need any further CT scans and we may be able to discharge you from our clinic. Alternatively, you may be required to have a repeat CT scan in 24 months' time.

What if I feel unwell before my next CT scan?

It is important to contact your GP if you develop any of the following symptoms between your CT scans, which may be a sign of an underlying respiratory condition:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing up blood
- Unexplained weight loss

Can I choose to opt out?

Yes. You can opt out of CT surveillance for your nodule altogether, or you can opt out of 'virtual' surveillance and instead be seen in the respiratory clinic.

Who do I contact with any questions?

Contact our lung specialist nurses Monday to Friday on 0121 507 5121 and leave a message which we will aim to respond to within 24 hours.

Further information

Callister, M. E. J., Baldwin, D. R., et al. (2015). British Thoracic Society guidelines for the investigation and management of pulmonary nodules: accredited by NICE. *Thorax*, 70 (Suppl 2), ii1-ii54.

National Health Service (2023) CT scan. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ct-scan/> [4 September 2024].

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