

Fine Needle Aspiration

Your doctor has referred you to us for Fine Needle Aspiration Biopsy (FNA) consultation. This pamphlet should answer the most commonly asked questions. If you have other questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or the consultant pathologist.

What is a Fine Needle Aspiration Biopsy?

A Fine Needle Aspiration Biopsy is a quick and reliable method of testing certain soft tissue lumps. To perform this test a very thin needle is passed through the skin to obtain some cells from a lump. These cells are studied under a microscope by the pathologist performing the test. In many cases this is an alternative to having the lump cut out under anaesthetic. It causes minimal discomfort, and is a quick and accurate method of finding out the nature of the lump. The needle used is much smaller than a standard blood test needle.

Why do I need a FNA?

Your doctor feels that FNA will help understand the nature of your lump, and whether anything further needs to be done. Often the test shows that a lump is harmless and can be left alone. Other lumps are best removed. In such cases, the results may help surgeons to plan better if they know exactly what is wrong.

How is a FNA performed?

FNA is performed by a specialist pathologist from Canterbury SCL. The pathologist will ask some questions and examine the lump. Sometimes the pathologist will determine that FNA is not required because the lump may have disappeared, the lump may be normal tissue, or for other reasons. The pathologist will explain these reasons to you. The pathologist will cleanse the skin with alcohol. A thin needle is inserted through the skin into the lump, and moved about to obtain a sample of cells. Usually it is not necessary to use local anaesthetic. Most patients compare the sensation to a blood test. Usually two or three "sticks" are necessary to obtain enough material. On completion, firm pressure is applied for several minutes to minimise any bruising.

Are there any complications? And are the results reliable?

FNA tests are very commonly performed worldwide, and significant problems are very rare. There may be bruising, swelling, and tenderness for a few days. Firm pressure applied for a few minutes afterwards will help prevent this.

The results of FNA are highly reliable when performed by experienced staff but depend on good sampling of the right part of the lump. Some lumps do not shed many cells. Sometimes the lump is difficult to find and sample with the needle. If a good sample is not obtained, further tests may be needed after a FNA. If you notice any change in a lump after a FNA, or are still worried, you should see your doctor again.

How long will the FNA take? And how long do the results take?

A FNA biopsy will take around twenty minutes. FNA examinations are performed by appointment and every effort is made by us to begin on time. In most cases the result is sent to your doctor within 2 working days. Sometimes special tests need to be done on the sample which may delay the result. The results are always sent to your doctor, who will then explain them to you, and arrange any follow up or further treatment you may need.

PLEASE NOTE: FNA Clinic is open Wednesday - Friday by appointment only at Northfield Collection Centre, 60 Langdons Road, Papanui. *To book an appointment: Please email your referral form and contact details to cscl.anatomicalpathology@sclabs.co.nz we will then contact you to arrange an appointment. Please call 03 360 0870 with any questions or if you are unable to email your form.*