

Lymphadenopathy in Children

What are lymph nodes?

Lymph nodes are a normal part of the immune system — small, usually pea-sized glands present in all parts of the body. There are approximately 600 lymph nodes in the body, with only those in the neck, armpits, and groin usually able to be felt.

What is lymphadenopathy?

Lymphadenopathy refers to a condition affecting the lymph glands, resulting in nodes that are abnormal in size, consistency (how they feel), or number. It can be local (affecting one area) or generalised (affecting multiple areas).

What causes lymphadenopathy?

The majority of causes are not serious and usually related to infections. Viral infections are a common cause of lymph nodes increasing in size, typically returning to normal within a week or two.

There are more serious causes too — some cancers can begin in lymph glands or spread there from elsewhere in the body. Fortunately, cancer as a cause is uncommon: one study of over 2500 patients presenting with enlarged lymph glands found only 1% had cancer as the cause, and cancer is even less commonly diagnosed in younger patients.

What tests need to be done to find out why I have got enlarged lymph glands?

It's important to see your doctor to explore whether there are other symptoms that may suggest a cause (e.g. a recent cold or infection, weight loss). Your doctor will examine the size, tenderness, and consistency of the glands (e.g. soft, hard, mobile under the skin), and check for any associated changes such as skin changes or local infection.

Sometimes a period of watchful waiting for the glands to return to normal size is appropriate before any tests are done.

Other times your doctor may arrange blood tests or scans for more information — blood tests looking for recent viral infection can be helpful, and an ultrasound of the lymph node can help exclude anything serious.

In a few cases, a biopsy of the gland may be needed if the cause remains unclear. This is usually done by a surgeon, who removes the gland and sends it for laboratory testing. This type of surgery is typically short and safe, and only needed occasionally.

References

1. Ferrer R. Lymphadenopathy: Differential Diagnosis and Evaluation. *American Family Physician*. 1998 Oct 15;58(6):1313-1320.
2. Fijten GH, Blijham GH. Unexplained lymphadenopathy in family practice. An evaluation of the probability of malignant causes and the effectiveness of physicians' workup. *Journal of Family Practice* 1988;27:373-376.

Further Questions?

The information presented in this fact sheet is intended as a general guide only.

Patients should seek further advice and information about **Lymphadenopathy in Children** and their individual

condition from their treating haematologist or doctor.

For additional information about blood disorders and their treatment, or to contact one of our specialist haematologists, visit the Melbourne Haematology website:

www.melbournehaematology.com.au