

Cervical Lymphadenitis

Information for parents and/or caregivers

Welcome to the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network. This information sheet is designed to answer any questions you may have about your child having cervical lymphadenitis

Cervical lymphadenitis

Cervical lymphadenitis is an enlargement of a lymph node (gland) in the neck, usually due to a viral or bacterial infection. Lymph nodes are part of our immune system, and they help fight infections. They act as filters but sometimes the organisms they filter cause an infection in the node itself. Lymph nodes are found in many areas of the body but the ones in the neck are the most commonly infected. This is called cervical (neck) lymphadenitis (lymph node inflammation). Children with this infection have a hard, red, painful, swollen area in the neck and may have a fever. Many lymph node infections heal well by themselves. Often, if a bacterial infection is suspected, they require antibiotics, but some may need surgery to drain the infection.

What is the cause?

Bacteria that are present in the nose, throat or mouth can spread to the lymph nodes and cause an infection. Many viruses can also cause cervical lymphadenitis.

Types of sedation medicine

The following medicines are the most common sedatives used in children. Not all sedation medicines suit all children. The nurse or doctor will assess your child and tell you which one of these medicines best suits your child.

What are the symptoms of cervical lymphadenitis?

- Cervical lymphadenitis is one or more large lumps that you can see or feel on the front, sides, or back of your child's neck.
- Swollen neck nodes are sometimes painful, especially when touched.
- The skin around the swollen neck nodes can be red or warm.
- Children can have other symptoms too, depending on what is causing the swollen neck nodes. For example, if the common cold is causing the swollen neck nodes, your child can also have a runny or blocked nose, or cough and fever.
- There are many reasons for the nodes to become swollen; not all swollen neck nodes are cervical lymphadenitis. You will need to see your treating doctor for a diagnosis based on clinical findings.

Will my child need tests?

The doctor may need to carry out some tests to see what is causing the swollen neck nodes. The tests will depend on how long the nodes have been swollen, if there are any other swollen nodes in other parts of the body, and your child's other symptoms.

The tests may include:

- Blood tests
- Throat swab
- Imaging, such as an ultrasound or CT scan (see CT information)
- A biopsy – During a biopsy, the doctor will remove the node or a small sample of tissue from the node. The biopsy is sent to the laboratory for further investigation. Your doctor will discuss this further with you if this test is necessary.

How is cervical lymphadenitis in children treated?

Treatment will depend on what is causing the swollen neck nodes, and your child's other symptoms.

- Swollen neck nodes that are caused by a bacterial infection will need treatment with antibiotics. Most children can take the antibiotic treatment orally at home. Your child needs to take the antibiotic as prescribed and do not stop taking the medicine until the course is completed, even if the symptoms are going away.
- If your child has a severe infection, he or she will need treatment in hospital.
- In hospital your child may be prescribed intravenous antibiotics (see IV cannulation information).

Is an operation needed?

If the infected gland becomes an abscess (a collection of pus inside a cavity) it will need to be drained. This can happen even if antibiotics are used early. The doctor looks for an abscess by feeling the gland and imaging results i.e. ultrasound or CT scan. Your doctor will give you further information if this is required.

An abscess needs to be cut open and drained for it to heal. This is done in an operating theatre, with the child under an anaesthetic.

If your doctor thinks an abscess has formed your child will be referred to a surgeon.

Pain relief

You can give your child paracetamol (eg Panadol) or ibuprofen (eg Nurofen) if experiencing pain from the swollen neck nodes. Please follow the packaging directions.

Fasting before sedation

Medicine for sedation can make children feel sick or vomit, so your child may have to fast (stop eating or drinking) for a few hours before the sedation. This will decrease the chance of vomiting when under sedation. Staff will advise you how long your child needs to fast.

Fluids

Make sure your child is drinking plenty of fluids.

Follow-up visit

All children with lymph node infections should see their doctor within 2 to 3 days of beginning treatment to make sure the lymph node is getting better. If it is not improving, further tests including blood tests or an ultrasound may need to be done, or possibly a change of treatment.

See a doctor urgently if:

- Your child has any difficulty swallowing liquids or breathing
- Your child starts to act very sick
- Your child has a new fever of 38.5°C or higher
- The lymph node is rapidly enlarging even though your child is taking oral antibiotics
- The swelling is enlarging after 48 hours of antibiotics and your child is not getting better

For more information

- See your family doctor
- For 24 hour health advice call – health direct Australia 1800 022 222
- Local emergency department

Adapted from

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For more information

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This document has been reviewed and endorsed by consumers.