

Neck Mass/Adenopathy

A person with a neck mass (abnormal lump) or adenopathy (swollen lymph nodes) may have imaging tests to determine if it is a normal structure or cancer.

For neck masses that cannot be felt and are not in the parotid (salivary) gland region or thyroid, ultrasound, CT without or with intravenous (IV) contrast or MRI without and with IV contrast of the neck may all be appropriate.

For neck masses that can be felt and are not in the parotid region or the thyroid, ultrasound (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/us-thyroid>) , CT (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/bodyct>) without and with IV contrast and MRI (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/bodymr>) without and with IV contrast of the neck, in addition to CT scan of the arteries (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/angioct>) and MRI of the arteries (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/angiomr>) , may all be appropriate.

For neck masses in the parotid region, MRI without and with IV contrast, CT without and with IV contrast, MRI without and with IV contrast, and ultrasound of the neck and parotid or salivary glands may all be appropriate.

For children with neck masses not in the parotid region or thyroid, CT (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/pedia-ct>) with IV contrast, MRI (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/pediatric-mri>) without and with IV contrast, and ultrasound of the neck may all be appropriate.

For more information, see the Head and Neck Cancer (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/hdneck>) page.

— By Rachel Newman, BS, and Elizabeth A. Sadowski, MD. This information originally appeared in the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

Disclaimer

This information is copied from the RadiologyInfo Web site (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org>) which is dedicated to providing the highest quality information. To ensure that, each section is reviewed by a physician with expertise in the area presented. All information contained in the Web site is further reviewed by an ACR (American College of Radiology) - RSNA (Radiological Society of North America) committee, comprising physicians with expertise in several radiologic areas.

However, it is not possible to assure that this Web site contains complete, up-to-date information on any particular subject. Therefore, ACR and RSNA make no representations or warranties about the suitability of this information for use for any particular purpose. All information is provided "as is" without express or implied warranty.

Please visit the RadiologyInfo Web site at <http://www.radiologyinfo.org> to view or download the latest information.

Note: Images may be shown for illustrative purposes. Do not attempt to draw conclusions or make diagnoses by comparing these images to other medical images, particularly your own. Only qualified physicians should interpret images; the radiologist is the physician expert trained in medical imaging.

Copyright

This material is copyrighted by either the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), 820 Jorie Boulevard, Oak Brook, IL 60523-2251 or the American College of Radiology (ACR), 1891 Preston White Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4397. Commercial reproduction or multiple distribution by any traditional or electronically based reproduction/publication method is prohibited.

Copyright © 2026 Radiological Society of North America, Inc.