
Dermatology

Skin biopsy in children - information for families

What is a punch skin biopsy?

This is a short procedure to remove a small piece of skin tissue for examination under the microscope. Sometimes it is necessary to grow skin cells (fibroblasts) for more complex analysis. It will be explained to you before the biopsy what type of testing is required.

Why does my child need this procedure?

A skin biopsy is usually performed to determine or confirm a diagnosis that cannot be made by blood tests.

What happens on the day?

Your child will usually have a skin biopsy in Clinic 7, level 3, Addenbrooke's Hospital as an outpatient procedure.

You may be asked to apply EMLA '® anaesthetic cream to the area at home, one to two hours before your child's appointment time. This will need to be covered with a clear adhesive dressing which we will provide. Cover the adhesive dressing with clothing in young children as they may otherwise try to remove it.

On arrival in Clinic 7 please report to the clinic reception desk. You will be asked to wait in the waiting room.

You will then be taken through to the theatre room, where the doctor will discuss questions, and ask you to sign a consent form. If your child is on any medications or is allergic to any medications, please inform the doctor.

What does the procedure involve?

Skin biopsies are usually done while your child is fully awake and a small area of skin will be numbed. Depending upon the site, young children may like to sit on your lap or lie with you on the couch during the procedure.

Your child may find it helpful to be distracted during the procedure - there are some suggestions at the end of this leaflet, and we have a selection of toys and a distraction lamp available in the clinic.

The biopsy takes a few minutes.

The EMLA cream and dressing are removed and the area cleaned. Local anaesthetic is injected and a slight burning sensation may be felt. Once the area is numb, the skin biopsy needle is gently inserted and 4mm (<1/4 inch) of skin is removed. This is usually felt only as a touch sensation. This skin is then sent to the laboratories. The biopsy site usually bleeds slightly after the procedure and is held closed either by a stitch which may need to be removed after a few days, or by Steristrip[®] 'paper stitches'. A dressing will be placed over the area.

You will be given an information sheet on how to look after the area and the dressing and your child can then go home. A small scar similar to a chickenpox scar will form.

When your child goes home

The biopsy site may feel uncomfortable for one to two days, especially if it is knocked, and Calpol (paracetamol) may be given. Your child can return to school or nursery the day after the biopsy.

How long will it take to get the test results?

If it is just necessary to look at skin under the microscope, results will be available in approximately three weeks. Growing fibroblasts takes at least six weeks. Analysis of genes responsible for a disease (carried on DNA) may take several months.

Suggestions for distraction during the procedure

- Breath control. This can be done by pretending to blow a feather up into the air, blowing up a real or imagined balloon or by blowing bubbles. Older children may just concentrate on their breathing.
- Books, story tapes, puzzles, handheld computer games or music: depending upon your child's age.
- Touch and feel toys: play with slime or dough, or cuddly toys; or toys to look at such as kaleidoscopes or rain-makers.



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



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