

Urgent referral for a CT lung scan - Information for patients

Why are you being offered this scan?

Your GP has referred you for an urgent CT scan of the lungs to investigate your symptoms further. Most people with persistent lung symptoms will not have anything seriously wrong with them, but rarely it can be a sign of cancer of the lungs.

A CT scan is a very good way of looking for lung cancer, and for most people, the scan results will rule out a lung cancer. The scan might also tell your GP if there is another condition causing your symptoms.

What is a CT scan?

A CT (computed tomography) scanner, sometimes referred to as a CAT scan, is a large, ring-shaped machine with a hole in its centre. The scanner is used to diagnose and monitor many different health conditions and is operated by healthcare professionals called radiographers who are specially trained to perform imaging procedures.

An X-ray tube inside the ring creates a beam of X-rays. As you lie flat on the CT scanner table, the X-ray tube rotates around your body. The X-rays pass through your body and are picked up by detectors on the opposite side. Signals picked up by the detectors are then collected by a computer and built up into two-dimensional images or 'slices' of the part of your body being studied.

A CT scan usually takes about 10–20 minutes although with some types of scanner it may be quicker.

CT scan appointment

A member of our radiology booking team will contact you to make an appointment for your scan. They will try to contact you by phone, so please make sure that your GP has up to date contact details for you.

Your GP has asked for this CT scan to be done urgently, so it is important that you make yourself available for the appointment, so that we can investigate your symptoms quickly.



On the day of the scan

Your radiographer will discuss with you what will happen during and after the CT scan and will also check if you have any of the following medical conditions:

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Heart condition
- Kidney problems
- Allergies – especially to the CT contrast medium ("dye").

If you are unsure about anything relating to the procedure, do not hesitate to ask. It is important that you feel fully informed, so that you are happy to proceed with the scan.

CT contrast medium ("dye")

As part of the scan you will be given an injection of a special CT contrast medium (commonly called a "dye"). This liquid shows up clearly on the scan pictures and helps distinguish blood vessels from other structures in your body. This dye is delivered into your body through a fine plastic tube called a cannula, which is placed into a vein in your arm by an experienced, trained nurse, radiographer or radiographer assistant. Inserting the cannula results in minor discomfort, usually no more than taking blood from your arm.

The injection of the "dye" may make you feel warm for a minute or two. You may have a metallic taste in your



mouth. You may also feel like you need to pass urine but this feeling doesn't last long. Contrast medium is actually colourless and will pass out of your body in urine. There is a small risk of your body reacting to the intravenous contrast. Tell your radiographer straightaway if you have any itching or difficulty breathing.

What to expect after the scan

You will have to wait for 20 minutes following the completion of the scan, so that the cannula is removed from your arm, before you go home.

Your scan will be reviewed by a radiologist (a doctor who specialises in using imaging methods to diagnose medical conditions). Usually the radiologist will send a report to your GP or the doctor who referred you for the CT scan. It can take several days, or even a week or two, for your results to come through.

If the CT scan indicates any abnormal areas in the lungs then the scan will be reviewed by the appropriate hospital specialist. The majority are common incidental findings, most of which are harmless, but sometimes we recommend that they are followed up later with repeat scans. Occasionally we see abnormalities in other areas outside of the lungs that may require more tests or a new referral.

The hospital will contact you by phone directly if your scan results mean that you need further hospital tests or if you urgently need to attend an outpatient appointment, or to discuss any further tests.

Rest assured that your GP will discuss with you the results and next steps.

What are the risks?

A CT scan exposes you to some radiation. We all receive some ionising radiation every day from food and drink and are exposed to natural background radiation in the atmosphere all the time. Different radiology tests and scans expose you to different doses of radiation. A CT scan gives out more radiation than other types of X-ray imaging, such as a plain X-ray. Equipment used is regularly safety checked and radiographers are trained to take the images using the lowest amount of radiation consistent with the intended diagnosis.

Allergic reactions to the intravenous contrast (IVC).

The decision to administer IVC is not taken lightly and is carefully made by the radiologist who is supervising the CT scan. The decision to administer the IVC is based on your past medical history and the clinical question raised by the doctor who referred you. Your GP has also considered these risks and feels the benefit of accurate diagnosis outweighs any potential health risk.

Who to contact for further information

Your GP remains your first point of contact for queries in relation to your symptoms or referral.

If you need to discuss only your CT appointment, please contact:

- Radiology Reception at University Hospital Lewisham on 020 8333 3047
- Radiology Reception at Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 020 8836 4744

Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

If you would like this information in another language or another format such as braille, large print or an electronic or audio file, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

University Hospital Lewisham
on **020 8333 3355**
or email **pals.lewisham@nhs.net**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital
on **020 8836 4592**
or email **pals.qeht@nhs.net**