

## ***Enlarged neck nodes in children (paediatric cervical lymphadenopathy)***

Children can have abnormally enlarged lymph nodes, also known as lymphadenopathy, as a part of many infections and other conditions. Just because you can feel a child's lymph nodes, which are present in many different areas of the body, doesn't necessarily mean that the child has an illness. It is not uncommon to feel some normal-sized lymph nodes in infants and toddlers, with the lymph nodes measuring less than about 1 cm. The tonsillar neck nodes or jugulo-digastric nodes on each side of the neck below the lower jaw are allowed to be 2.5cm in size.

### **Lymphadenopathy**

Most children with lymphadenopathy have reactive lymph nodes, which are lymph nodes that become enlarged as a reaction to a nearby infection. For example, if your child has an infected insect bite on his leg, the lymph nodes in his groin will likely become enlarged. Or if a child has tonsillitis or a viral upper respiratory tract infection, then he will likely have cervical (neck) lymphadenopathy. Scalp eczema can give rise to posterior or occipital lymphadenopathy in children.

A more serious cause of lymphadenopathy might be suspected if a child also has other symptoms, such as fever, weight loss, fatigue, and night sweats and/or if the enlarged lymph nodes are:

- a) found in more than one region of the body (generalized lymphadenopathy)
- b) non-tender, firm, and fixed (don't easily move around)
- c) larger than about 2.5 cm
- d) growing rapidly

### **Investigations**

Often a clinical examination and reassurance is all that is required. Other investigations are arranged based on clinical suspicion such as:

- a) Blood tests
- b) Ultrasound examination of neck
- c) Chest x-ray
- d) Excision biopsy (see image)

### **Outcome**

Sometimes a 10 day course of broad spectrum antibiotic is prescribed to shrink enlarged neck nodes. Keep in mind that swollen lymph nodes can take weeks or months to return to normal size and since younger children can average 6 to 8 upper respiratory tract infections each year, it may seem like your child's lymph nodes are enlarged for years. Following discharge from clinic parents can remain vigilant for further enlargement of nodes and arrange reassessment if necessary.

