

# Cancer Staging in Dogs and Cats

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is cancer staging?

Cancer staging involves diagnostic testing to determine the extent of cancer within a dog or cat's body. The stage of cancer is determined by the tumor grade and size, and whether the cancer has spread to any other areas of the body.

### Why are staging tests important?

Based on a pet's specific cancer type, we can predict the likelihood that their tumor will spread to other areas of the body. Common sites of cancer spread include lymph nodes, the lungs, and organs in the abdomen such as the liver. It is important that your pet's cancer is staged at the time of diagnosis, as the results of staging tests will affect treatment options as well as your pet's prognosis. Periodic recheck staging tests (called 'restaging') are also important during your pet's treatment protocol to ensure that no signs of cancer progression are seen, as this would impact further treatment recommendations.

### How are staging tests performed?

Staging tests are performed in different ways, depending on the body area/organ being evaluated.

- **Lymph nodes** can be sampled by fine needle aspiration (FNA) or biopsy. A lymph node FNA is a quick procedure which typically does not require sedation. A thin needle is inserted into the lymph node, and a small number of cells are withdrawn and spread on a microscope slide for interpretation by a pathologist (cytology); results take one or two business days. Lymph node biopsy involves heavy sedation or general anesthesia to surgically remove a small piece or the entire lymph node for histopathology; results take three to five business days.
- **Evaluation of the lungs** is typically performed with radiographs (X-rays) of the chest, but sometimes advanced imaging with a CT scan is necessary to fully evaluate the lung field and other structures in the chest. Radiographs may be performed in awake or mildly sedated pets, while a CT scan requires general anesthesia.

- **Ultrasound is typically used to evaluate the abdominal organs, including the liver, spleen, kidneys, lower urinary tract, stomach, intestines, adrenal glands, and abdominal lymph nodes.** During abdominal ultrasound, your pet must lay still on their back for approximately 15-30 minutes, and their abdominal fur is shaved to allow for adequate visualization. Some pets will benefit from mild sedation for the ultrasound so they are relaxed, and we can obtain the best quality images. Abnormalities noted on abdominal ultrasound are often evaluated by ultrasound-guided FNA.

At MedVet, our **board-certified veterinary radiologists** evaluate all radiographs, CT, and MRI images taken at our hospital. They perform all ultrasound scans and provide real-time interpretation. A formal report of the imaging findings will be included in your pet's medical record and provided to your primary veterinarian.



*For more information about cancer staging for dogs and cats, contact MedVet Cincinnati directly at 513.561.0069 or visit [medvet.com](http://medvet.com).*