

Nodules

USC Pulmonary Clinic

What is it? This is a spot on your lung that is less than 3 cm. A “mass” is greater than 3 cm.

What causes it? There are many causes. Some possibilities include infection, scars, pulmonary disorders like sarcoidosis and cancer.

What are the symptoms? Patients with nodules generally do not have any specific symptoms. That is why continued follow-up is so important!

How is it diagnosed? They are often noted on CXR's done to look for other problems. CT scans are the best way to characterize them and determine how many are present.

How do we determine the cause of the nodule? When nodules are very small (<8 mm), we usually watch them with serial CT scans. If they grow, we will generally do biopsies. The size and location help us decide how to go about doing the biopsy. There are several options for biopsy that your doctor will discuss with you.

What is the treatment? If the biopsy shows infection or inflammation, you

will likely be treated medically. If cancer is discovered, you will have other tests done to see if you are candidate to have the cancer removed by a surgeon. If the cancer has spread, you will see an oncologist (cancer specialist) and they will determine how to treat you.

What is my risk that the nodule is cancer? There are many factors that go in to this calculation. They include age, smoking history, certain exposures, the character and size of the nodule and prior cancers.

What if I have many nodules instead of just one? Unless you have a history of cancer, multiple nodules are *less* likely to be from cancer. Your doctor will look for an alternative pulmonary diagnosis in these cases.

How long do you follow a nodule by CT scans? Most guidelines recommend following a nodule until it has been stable for two years. There may be exceptions to this rule, however. If the nodule gets significantly smaller or resolves, there is usually no need to continue the scans.

