

# About Nasal and Paranasal Sinus Cancer - A Quick Guide



## Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'About Nasal and Paranasal Sinus cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

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## The nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses

Your nostrils open into the nasal cavity. The nasal cavity warms and moistens the air we breathe and helps filter out harmful bacteria. It runs back from the nostrils, above the roof of your mouth and curves down to connect with your mouth at the back of your throat.

The area where the nose and throat meet is called the nasopharynx. If you have cancer here it's called nasopharyngeal cancer. Cancer here is a different type

from nasal and paranasal sinus cancer and is dealt with in different information on CancerHelp UK.

## Paranasal sinuses

Paranasal means around or near your nose. Sinuses are spaces or small tunnels. Paranasal sinuses are small, air filled spaces within the bones of your face. They are below and between your eyes, above and behind your nose, and behind your cheeks. They give your voice its clarity and tone and lighten the weight of your skull. There are several pairs of sinuses and cancer can develop in any of them.

The diagram below shows the position of the different sinuses.

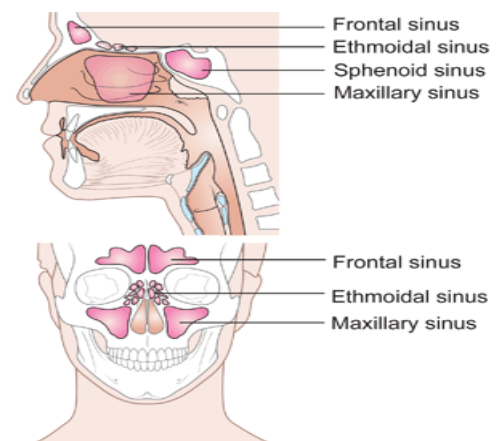


Diagram showing the position of the sinuses  
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## The lymph nodes in your neck

Like other parts of the body, the head and neck contain lymph nodes (also called lymph glands). These small, bean shaped glands are part of the lymphatic system. Lymph nodes are often the first place cancer cells spread to when they break away from a tumour. There are major groups of lymph nodes in the neck. Nasal and paranasal sinus cancers can spread to these nodes.

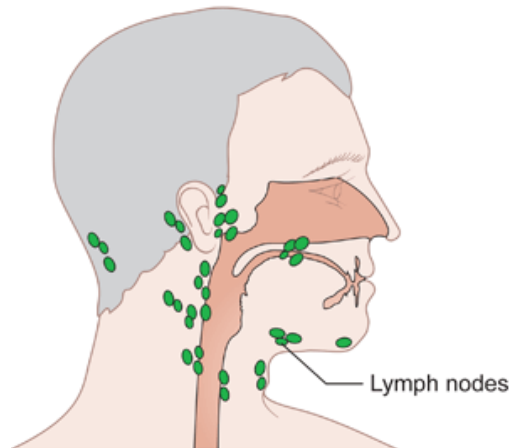


Diagram showing the lymph nodes in the head and neck  
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## Risks and causes of nasal and sinus cancers

Cancers of the nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses are rare. We don't know exactly what causes most of these types of cancers, but we do know that a few things affect your risk.

### Smoking

Smoking tobacco (cigarettes, cigars and pipes) increases your risk of nasal cavity cancer. If you smoke regularly you are at a higher than average risk of developing this type of cancer. Cancers of the nasal cavity

are quite rare, even in people who smoke, but smoking does significantly increase your risk.

### Other possible risk factors

Over many years of exposure, some workplace chemicals can increase the risk of nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers. Substances that have been linked to these types of cancers include, wood dust, formaldehyde, nickel, and dust from chromium or leather.

Researchers have looked into history of nasal polyps, infection with human papilloma virus (HPV), passive smoking and workplace exposure to textile dust or asbestos, but there isn't enough evidence to be sure these increase risk of nasal cancers..

## Symptoms of nasal and sinus cancers

Nasal and paranasal cancers may cause the symptoms below

### Nose problems

- Blockages causing stuffiness in one side of your nose that will not go away
- Nosebleeds
- Decreased sense of smell
- Mucus coming from the nose, or draining into the back of your nose and throat

### Eye problems

- Bulging of one eye
- Complete or partial loss of sight
- Double vision
- Pain above or below the eye
- A watery eye with tears running down the cheek



## Other symptoms

Other symptoms can include a lump or growth anywhere on the face, nose or roof of the mouth, pain or numbness in parts of your face, loose teeth, difficulty opening your mouth, enlarged lymph nodes in your neck, or pain or pressure in one of your ears.

There are many other conditions much less serious than cancer that can cause these symptoms.

## Screening for nasal and sinus cancers

Screening means testing people for early signs of a disease before they have any symptoms.

A screening test for cancer must be reliable at picking up cancers that are there. And it must not give false positive results in people who do not have cancer. If there is no such screening test, it isn't possible to screen large numbers of people for that type of cancer.

There is no national screening programme in the UK for nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers. These cancers are rare in the UK. Even if we had a reliable test, it would cost a lot of money to screen everyone for a disease only a very small number of people get. Any screening test would need to be simple and cheap to perform.

With uncommon diseases, it is most cost effective to screen people who are thought to be at a higher risk. But first, we need to be able to identify those at higher risk.

## Types of nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers

Several layers of tissue make up each part of the nasal cavity (nose) and paranasal sinuses. Each layer contains many different types of cells. Different cancers can develop from each type of cell. It is important for doctors to recognise the type to help them decide on how best to treat the cancer. Tumours of the nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses can be non cancerous (benign), or cancerous (malignant).

## Squamous cell cancers

More than 6 out of 10 nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers (60%) are squamous cell carcinomas. Squamous cells are the flat, skin like cells that cover the lining of the mouth, nose, larynx, thyroid and throat. Carcinoma just means cancer. So squamous cell carcinoma is cancer that starts in these cells.

## Other types of nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancer

Adenocarcinomas that start in the gland cells are the next most common type of nose and paranasal sinus cancer. Cancers in these areas can also be lymphomas, plasmacytomas (closely related to myeloma), melanomas or sarcomas, and rare tumours called neuroendocrine carcinomas. If you are looking for information on any of these types of cancer, this is not the right information for you. You need to go to the section of CancerHelp UK that is about the type of cancer you have.



## Grade and nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers

Cancers that look most like normal cells under the microscope are called 'low grade'. The most abnormal looking are called high grade. Generally speaking, a low grade cancer will grow more slowly and be less likely to spread than a high grade cancer.

## Should I see a nasal cancer specialist?

It can be very difficult for GPs to decide who to refer to a specialist. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced guidelines to help GPs decide who should be seen urgently by a specialist.

## Urgent referral guidelines

According to Department of Health guidelines, you should ideally get an appointment within 2 weeks for an urgent referral. The NICE guidelines say you may need urgent referral to a specialist if you have

- An unexplained lump in your neck that is new, or has changed in the previous 3 - 6 weeks
- An unexplained sore throat that has lasted longer than it should
- Unexplained swelling in the glands under your ear, or around your lower jaw, that does not go away
- Unexplained pain on one side of your head or neck for more than 4 weeks, with ear ache for no apparent reason

The guidelines also say the GP should send you for an urgent chest X-ray if you have had a hoarse, husky or quieter than normal voice for more than 3 weeks, particularly if

you are a smoker aged over 50, or a regular, heavy drinker.

## If you are still worried

If you think your GP is not taking your symptoms as seriously as they should, you could take this PDF along to an appointment.



## What to ask your doctor about nasal and sinus cancer

- Am I more likely to get cancer of the nasal cavity or paranasal sinuses than anyone else?
- I used to smoke - does this mean I will get a nasal cavity or paranasal sinus cancer?
- How should I go about giving up smoking?
- How will I know if I have cancer of the nasal cavity or paranasal sinuses?
- I am exposed to certain chemicals or wood dust at work. Does this affect my risk of nasal cavity or paranasal sinus cancers?
- Can I be screened for nasal cavity or paranasal sinus cancers?
- Do nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers run in families?
- Is there anything I can do to reduce my risk of nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancers?

### More information

For more information about nasal and paranasal sinus cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040**

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in March 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).