

Staging of lymphoma

This page is about staging of Hodgkin lymphoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Staging is used to work out which parts of your body are affected by lymphoma.

On this page

[What is staging?](#)

[Staging of lymphoma in adults](#)

[Staging of lymphoma in children](#)

[‘Early’ stage and ‘advanced’ stage lymphoma](#)

What is staging?

‘Staging’ is the process of working out which parts of your body are affected by lymphoma (how ‘advanced’ your lymphoma is). The **tests and scans** you have when you are diagnosed help doctors to work out the stage of your lymphoma.

Staging lymphoma is important because it helps your medical team plan the most appropriate treatment for you. Different **types** and stages of lymphoma respond to different types and combinations of treatments.

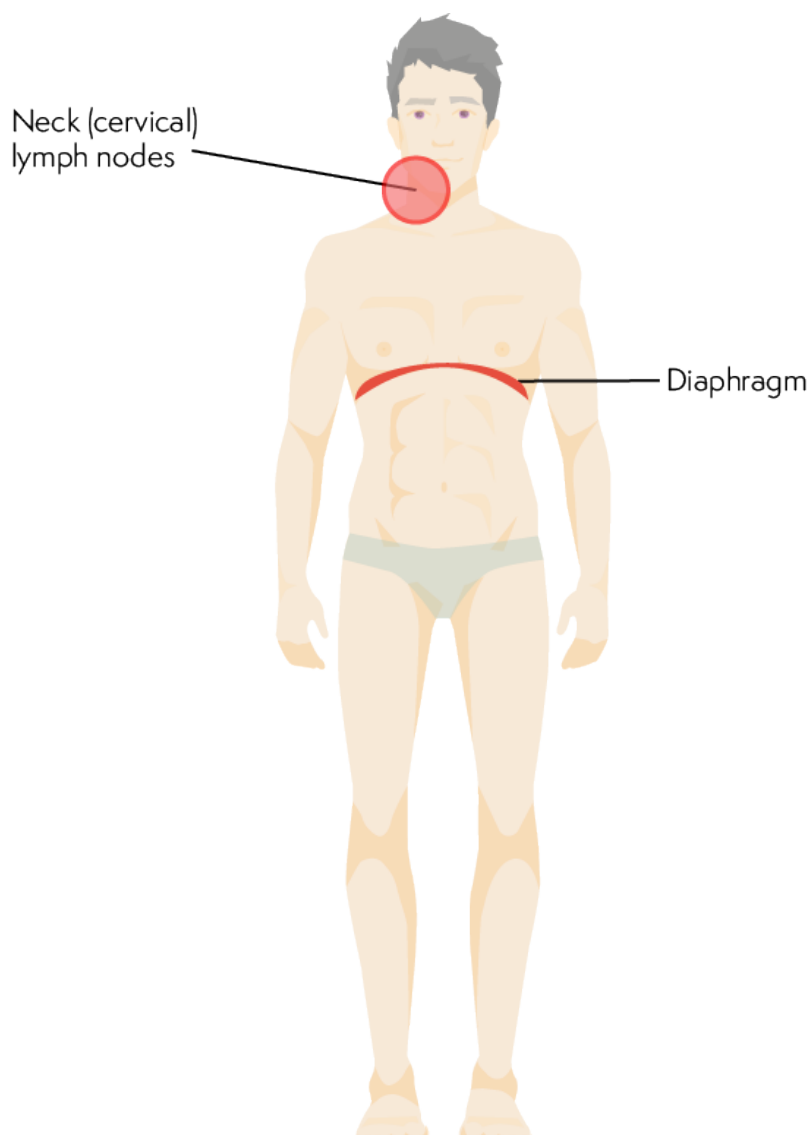
The same staging system is used for **Hodgkin** and **non-Hodgkin** lymphomas, with a few exceptions:

- Staging for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in children is slightly different from staging in adults.
 - **Staging for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL)**, often considered a form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, uses a different system. This is described on our [webpage about CLL](#). **Small lymphocytic lymphoma (SLL)**, which is a form of CLL affecting the lymph nodes, is staged the same as other non-Hodgkin lymphomas.
 - **Cutaneous (skin) lymphomas** (lymphomas that start in the skin) behave differently from other lymphomas and are staged differently. Staging of skin lymphomas depends on whether they are B-cell skin lymphomas or T-cell skin lymphomas.
 - **Waldenström's macroglobulinaemia**, a rare type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma that does not often affect the lymph nodes, does not have a standard staging system.
-

Staging of lymphoma in adults

Staging in adults is the same for Hodgkin lymphoma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. There are four main stages of lymphoma. These are numbered 1 to 4, sometimes written in Roman numerals as I to IV. **Letters after the numbers** are sometimes also used.

Stage 1

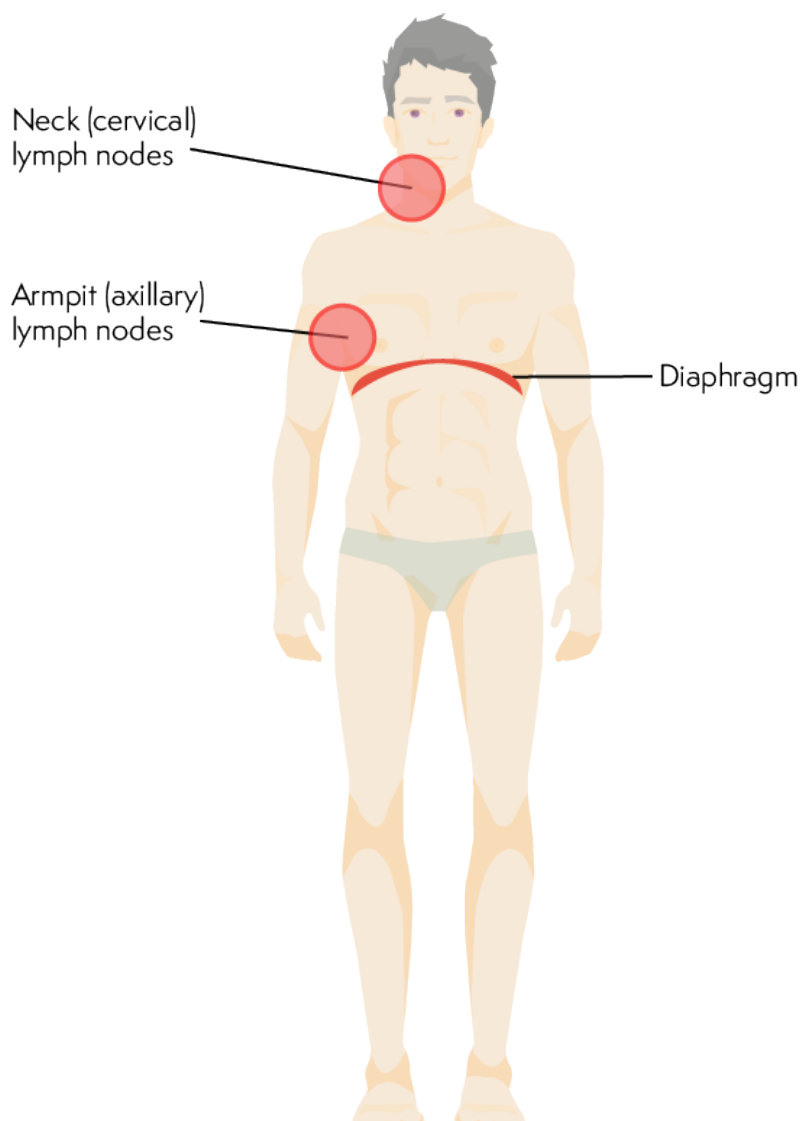


Stage 1: Only one group of lymph nodes affected anywhere in the body

Stage 1 means that there is lymphoma in only one group of **lymph nodes** (glands). The diagram shows these in the neck, but they can be anywhere in the body, either above or below the diaphragm (the sheet of muscle separating your chest from your tummy).

Stage 1E lymphoma means that the lymphoma started in a single body organ outside the **lymphatic system** and is only in that organ. This is called **extranodal lymphoma**.

Stage 2

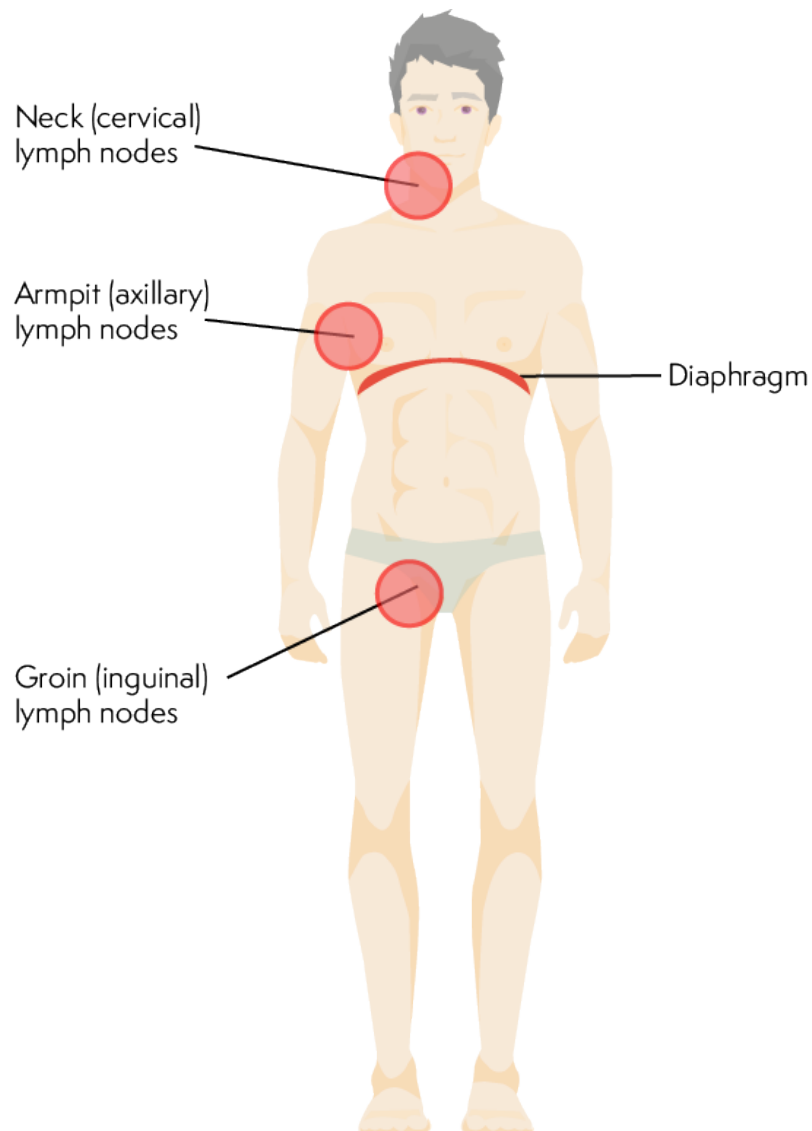


Stage 2: Two or more groups of lymph nodes affected, all on the same side of the diaphragm (either above or below)

Stage 2 means there is lymphoma in two or more groups of lymph nodes. These can be anywhere in the body, but to be diagnosed with stage 2 lymphoma, they must all be on the same side of the diaphragm.

Stage 2E (extranodal lymphoma) means the lymphoma started in one body organ (not in the lymphatic system) and is also in one or more groups of lymph nodes. These must all be on the same side of the diaphragm.

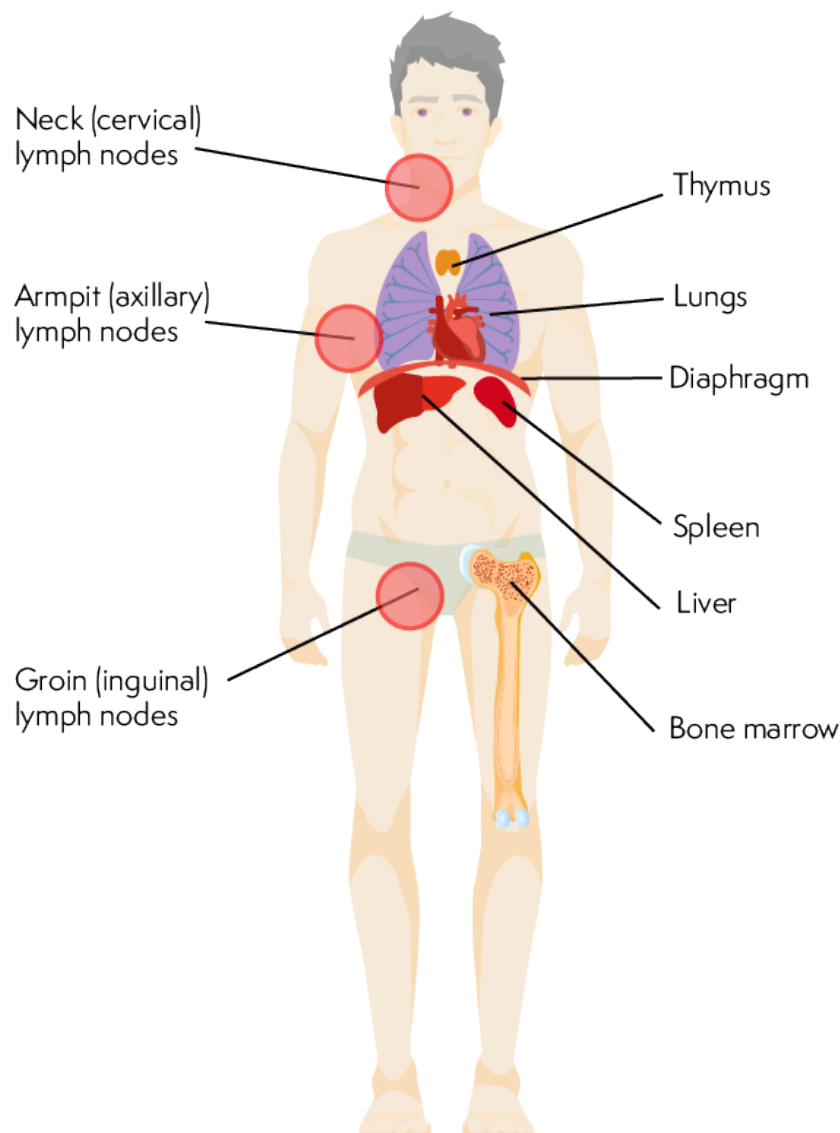
Stage 3



Stage 3: Lymph nodes affected on both sides of the diaphragm

Stage 3 means there are lymph nodes that contain lymphoma on both sides of the diaphragm.

Stage 4



Stage 4: Lymphoma either in organs outside the lymphatic system or in the bone marrow

Stage 4 is the most **advanced stage** of lymphoma. Lymphoma started in the lymph nodes and has spread to at least one body organ outside the lymphatic system (for example, the lungs, liver, bone marrow or solid bones).

The **spleen** and the **thymus** are part of the lymphatic system, so lymphoma in those organs only does not count as stage 4.

Letters or numbers after your stage

You may have the letters 'A' or 'B' after your stage. 'A' means you **don't** have any of the following symptoms:

- unintentional weight loss
- drenching night sweats
- fevers (temperatures above 38°C).

'B' means you have one or more of these symptoms. They are sometimes called '**B symptoms**'.

For example, if your lymphoma is stage 2A, you have lymphoma in two or more groups of lymph nodes on the same side of your diaphragm and you haven't had any of the B symptoms. However if you have had at least one B symptom, then you have stage 2B lymphoma.

Extranodal lymphoma

Doctors also sometimes use the letter 'E', which stands for 'extranodal'. It means that the lymphoma started in a body organ that is not part of the **lymphatic system**, for example, in the digestive system or in the salivary glands. It doesn't include lymphoma that has started in a lymph node and spread to a body organ, which would be stage 4.

Lymphoma in the spleen and thymus

The **spleen** and the **thymus** are body organs that are part of the lymphatic system. Lymphoma that is in these organs is not regarded as extranodal. If you have lymphoma in the spleen, your doctor may put 'S' after your stage. For example, 1S is stage 1 lymphoma that is only in the spleen.

Bulky disease

You might see the letter 'X' after your number. This means that one or more of your affected lymph nodes is large or 'bulky' (at least 10cm across).

Numbers after your stage

Occasionally, you may see a number in brackets or a smaller font next to your stage, for example stage 2(2). This second number tells you how many groups of lymph nodes contain lymphoma. For example, stage 2(2) means stage 2 lymphoma with lymphoma cells in two groups of lymph nodes.

Staging of lymphoma in children

Lymphoma in children and young people does not always behave the same way as lymphoma in adults. We cover staging of lymphoma in children and adolescents on this page. For further information, we have a separate section on [lymphoma in children and young people](#).

Hodgkin lymphoma in children is staged the same way as in adults. Non-Hodgkin lymphoma is staged slightly differently.

There are four main stages of non-Hodgkin lymphoma in children and adolescents (under 20 years old). They are numbered 1 to 4, sometimes written in Roman numerals as I to IV. Letters after the numbers are sometimes also used.

Stage 1

Lymphoma in only:

- one group of [lymph nodes](#), excluding the chest or abdomen (tummy) **or**
 - one body organ outside the [lymphatic system](#) ([extranodal lymphoma](#)), excluding in the chest or abdomen (tummy) **or**
 - one bone **or**
 - the [spleen](#).
-

Stage 2

Lymphoma in:

- two or more lymph nodes on the same side of the diaphragm (the sheet of muscle separating your chest from your tummy) **or**
 - one extranodal body organ and a nearby group of lymph nodes **or**
 - the gut (nearby lymph nodes may also be affected as long as the lymphoma is localised and can be removed by surgery).
-

Stage 3

Lymphoma in:

- two or more extranodal body organs (including bone or skin) **or**
 - lymph nodes above and below the diaphragm **or**
 - the chest **or**
 - the gut (including the liver, spleen, kidneys or ovaries) unless it is localised and can be removed by surgery (see Stage 2) **or**
 - around the spinal cord **or**
 - one bone plus an extranodal body organ or distant lymph nodes.
-

Stage 4

Lymphoma in:

- the central nervous system (brain or spinal cord) **or**
 - the **bone marrow**.
-

There may be letters after the stage:

- 'CNS' shows that the lymphoma involves the central nervous system (brain or spinal cord).
 - 'BM' shows that the lymphoma involves the bone marrow.
 - 'B' show that the lymphoma affects bone.
 - 'EN' shows that the lymphoma started outside the lymphatic system (**extranodal**).
 - 'N' shows that the lymphoma affects the lymph nodes.
 - 'S' shows that the lymphoma affects the skin.
-

'Early' stage and 'advanced' stage

You may hear your specialist talk about 'early' (or 'limited') stage or 'advanced' stage lymphoma. This is a simplified version of the staging described above.

'Early' stage means that you have either stage 1 or stage 2 lymphoma. 'Advanced' stage generally means that you have either stage 3 or stage 4 lymphoma.

The lymphatic system is all over the body, so it is common for lymphoma to be advanced stage when it is diagnosed. Unlike many other cancers, advanced stage lymphoma can be successfully treated. Depending on the exact type of lymphoma, it may be cured or kept under control for a long time.

References

The full list of references for this page is available on our website. Alternatively, email publications@lymphoma-action.org.uk or call 01296 619409 if you would like a copy.

Acknowledgements

- With thanks to Dr Eve Gallop-Evans, Consultant Clinical Oncologist, Velindre Cancer Centre, Cardiff, for reviewing this information.
- We would like to thank the members of our Reader Panel who gave their time to review this information.

Content last reviewed: April 2019

Next planned review: April 2022

LYMweb0008StagesLym2019v3



© Lymphoma Action

Tell us what you think and help us to improve our resources for people affected by lymphoma. If you have any feedback, please visit lymphoma-action.org.uk/Feedback or email publications@lymphoma-action.org.uk.

All our information is available without charge. If you have found it useful and would like to make a donation to support our work you can do so on our website lymphoma-action.org.uk/Donate. Our information could not be produced without support from people like you. Thank you.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to make sure that the information we provide is accurate at time of publication, but medical research is constantly changing. Our information is not a substitute for individual medical advice from a trained clinician. If you are concerned about your health, consult your doctor.

Lymphoma Action cannot accept liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third party information we refer to, including that on third party websites.

Neither the Information Standard scheme operator nor the scheme owner shall have any responsibility whatsoever for costs, losses or direct or indirect damages or costs arising from inaccuracy of information or omissions in the information published on the website on behalf of Lymphoma Action.