

Mediastinoscopy

What is it?

Mediastinoscopy is also known as cervical mediastinoscopy, or cervical mediastinal exploration (CME). It is a minimally invasive operation performed by a thoracic surgeon.

What is it used for?

Mediastinoscopy is used to biopsy or remove lymph nodes located in the center of the chest, or to biopsy tissue from a mass in the center of the chest (mediastinal mass.)

How is it done?

The patient is placed under general anesthesia. The neck is comfortably extended, and the neck and chest are prepped with sterile solution.

A small one and one-half inch incision is made at the base of the neck, just above the breast bone. The muscles in the lower neck are separated, and the trachea (windpipe) is located. The surgery follows the windpipe down into the chest, where the lymph nodes or mass are located. A mediastinoscope, a small metal tube with a light source inside, is introduced through the skin incision into the center of the chest. Through this tube the biopsies are done. When the biopsy is complete, the mediastinoscope is removed, and the skin and other tissues are closed with absorbable suture material.

What are the risks?

The risk of mediastinoscopy is very low, less than one percent. If there is a problem during surgery, it is related to bleeding from a large blood vessel inside the chest. On a very rare occasion, the chest may have to be opened by sternotomy or thoracotomy to repair a bleeding blood vessel.