



## **Pediatric Neck Masses**

Neck masses are bumps that appear on your child's neck, often from a swollen lymph node that is caused by infection. Swollen lymph nodes usually return to their normal size within a few weeks. Lumps that are larger than one centimeter or present for three or more weeks may be an indication of a more serious problem, such as a congenital defect or even cancer.

Some children suffer from congenital neck masses, which are present at birth and gradually become larger as the child grows. These lumps may not be noticeable until the child is several years old. Once a lump has been identified, your doctor may perform a series of diagnostic procedures to determine the size, type and location of the mass. Diagnosis for a neck mass may include a CT scan, blood test, ultrasound, biopsy and fine needle aspiration, depending on the age and overall health of the child.

Treatment for neck masses depends on the type and location of the mass. It is important to seek treatment for a neck mass before it has a chance to get infected. The best treatment for your child's condition depends on the age and overall health of the child and the severity of the condition.

There are several different types of neck masses commonly treated at the Institute. Some of these types include:

### **Branchial Cleft Abnormalities**

Branchial cleft fistulas or cysts appear on the neck at any age as a soft lump of abnormally formed tissues. These formations can cause a fluid-filled cyst or a passageway to one an opening in the skin's surface (fistula). Branchial cleft abnormalities form when the tissues within the neck do not properly grow together and

Branchial cleft abnormalities usually appear on the neck as small lumps, but can also cause symptoms such as difficulty swallowing and breathing. This type of cyst is most common in children under the age of ten. Treatment for this type of mass is done through surgical incision, which involves a short outpatient procedure that is performed under general anesthesia.

### **Thyroglossal Duct Cyst**

A thyroglossal duct cyst develops from the cells and tissues that remain after the thyroid gland has been formed during embryonic development. This type of mass is most common in preschool-aged children and often first appears after an upper respiratory infection.

Thyroglossal duct cysts appear as a small, soft mass in the front of the neck, and may also cause tenderness, redness and swelling if it becomes infected. Children with this type of mass may also experience difficulty swallowing or breathing, and may have a drainage of mucus and from the cyst. Thyroglossal duct cysts can often be treated through antibiotic medication to relieve the infection, although surgical removal may be required as well, through a technique called the Sistrunk procedure.

### **Dermoid Cyst**

A dermoid cyst is a pocket of cells under the skin that contains tissues that are normally found on the outer layers of the skin. This type of mass is a congenital defect that occurs when the skin layers do not grow properly together, and can contain skin and hair glands that are trapped underneath the skin. This type of mass can also appear on the scalp, face or in the nose.

Dermoid cysts appear on the skin as a small lump in the middle of the neck, which does not usually cause any type of pain or discomfort. Treatment for this type of cyst usually involves surgical removal through a simple, minimally invasive procedure.