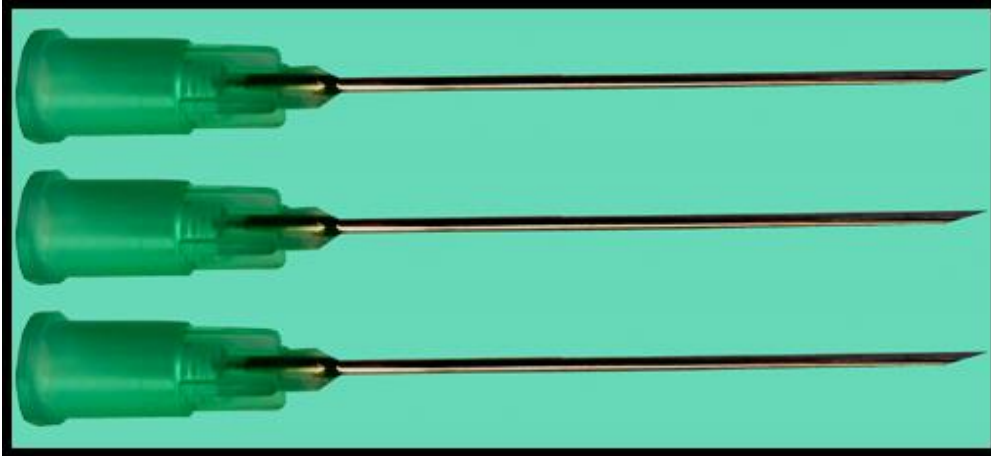




The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

## Object 39: FNA needle



### What is it?

Fine needle aspiration (FNA) is a technique used by cytopathologists to obtain a sample of cells for microscopic examination. FNA is used to collect a sample of cells from a mass that is within reach of a standard sterile hypodermic needle, such as is used to take a blood sample. Lumps in the skin, breast, thyroid or salivary gland, for example, may be sampled using FNA.

### History

FNA has been in use as a diagnostic technique since the 1980s. No special equipment is needed – just a needle attached to a syringe. Some cytopathologists use a syringe-holder to make aspiration easier. FNA has replaced biopsy as the first investigation of many palpable lumps, making diagnosis quicker, cheaper and easier.

### Pathology

Cytopathology is the pathology specialty involved in the diagnosis of disease through the examination of cells from fluids or solid masses. Cytopathologists often perform FNAs themselves, although they also interpret samples obtained by other doctors. The material obtained from FNA is carefully smeared on a glass slide, stained and examined under the microscope.

### Find out more

Visit your local pathology department to see how cytopathologists diagnose disease. Check out our [programme](#) of events to see if there's a lab open day near you.