

External (Peripheral) Lymph Nodes

Mammals have numerous external lymph nodes (also called peripheral lymph nodes) that can be palpated during a physical examination. This is of great advantage because we can easily feel if they are enlarged without having to rely on diagnostic tests. Reptiles and birds do not have external lymph nodes.

Five external lymph nodes are routinely palpated during a physical exam. All of them are paired, which is another advantage because we can compare one to another and notice subtle changes in size:

Submandibular

They are located in the neck area near the angle of the jaw. They lay right next to the salivary glands, so it is important to palpate the correct structure.



The **submandibular lymph nodes** are located at the ventral aspect of the neck near the angle of the jaw. **There usually are two on each side just cranial to the mandibular salivary gland. The trick to palpating them is to grab the extra skin of the ventral neck between the thumb and forefingers. Slowly move your hands rostrally, and the nodes should slip through your fingers. In the cat, these nodes are normally pea sized,** whereas in the dog, they vary from pea sized (small dogs) to small grape sized (large dogs).

Prescapular

Located just in front of the shoulders. Follow the arm up to the point of the shoulder to find them.



The **prescapular lymph nodes** lie in the connective tissue just cranial and dorsal to the shoulder joint. Again, it is easiest to grab the skin and muscles and then let the lymph nodes slip through your fingers as you pull your hands cranially. These lymph nodes range from similar in size to slightly larger than the submandibular nodes.

Axillary

Found on each side of the chest in the armpit area. They tend to be small, and are more forward than most people realize.



Usually, the axillary and inguinal lymph nodes will be palpated only if enlarged.

Inguinal

Found on the abdomen towards the inside of each rear leg. There is significant fat in this area, so they might be difficult to find, even if enlarged. Also, there is mammary tissue in the area that can easily feel like an enlarged lymph node if the mammary tissue has an infection or cancer.



Usually, the axillary and inguinal lymph nodes will be palpated only if enlarged.

Popliteal

Found on each rear leg on the opposite side of the knee. They are relatively superficial and easy to feel.



The **popliteal lymph** nodes can be palpated in the fat pad just caudal to the stifle joint.

We will gladly teach you how to palpate these lymph nodes whenever you bring your pet in for an exam. **These are internal organs so they are always palpated in a gentle manner.** You might want to palpate them on a monthly basis at home. If you think they are enlarged bring your pet in for an exam so we can determine if there is a problem.

Sources: <http://www.lbah.com/lymphnode.htm>, Clinical Textbook for Veterinary Technicians 5th ed.