OSCE checklist for lymph node examination

An OSCE checklist for lymph node examination goes through the nodes of the head and neck, the armpit, the elbow, the groin and the knee, then the liver and spleen. This is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity, explain and gain consent. Offer a chaperone for the armpit and groin.
2. Ask the patient to tell you if anything hurts, and ask about any lump they know about.
3. Inspect the neck, armpits and groin for swelling, scars and skin changes.
4. Head and neck: feel the nodes under the chin, jaw, ears, back of the head, along the neck and above the collarbone, comparing sides.
5. Armpit: support the arm and feel the central, front, back, side and top (apical) groups.
6. Elbow: feel the node above the inner elbow.
7. Groin: feel the nodes below the groin crease and, if asked, the back of the knees.
8. Describe any node by site, size, tenderness, firmness, whether it moves and whether it is attached to skin.
9. Look for a cause nearby, such as an infection in the scalp, throat, skin or breast.
10. Examine the liver and spleen, and say what other examinations you would do.
11. Cover the patient, thank them and wash your hands.

What candidates commonly forget

- Feeling both sides and comparing.
- Looking for a nearby cause.
- Describing nodes in words, not just "enlarged".
- Checking the liver and spleen.
- Asking about night sweats, fever and weight loss.

How to use this list

This is our own practice checklist. Exam bodies mark in their own way. Use it to build a routine, then say each step aloud as you do it. You can also practise with an AI patient on this site, and try one station free with no sign-up. For a general station frame, see the general OSCE checklist.

Common questions

Which features of a lymph node are worrying?

The NHS lists nodes that keep growing, feel hard, do not move, or sit near the collarbone, and general symptoms such as night sweats, as reasons to see a doctor.

How should I describe a node?

Give its site, size, tenderness, firmness, mobility and any skin change.

Is this a marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

Sources

- NHS: Swollen glands
- NICE: Suspected cancer, recognition and referral (NG12)
- WHO: Hand hygiene

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.