



AJCC 7th Edition Melanoma Staging

The following rules and rationale were vetted by the entire AJCC Melanoma Expert Panel including UICC representatives at the November 17, 2015 meeting. The differences allowed from the Chapter 1 rules are slight and based on appropriate medical care of the patient.

CLINICAL CLASSIFICATION

Rules

- **General:** includes information from the time of the diagnosis up until the definitive treatment
- **T category** – excision of the primary tumor which may include shave bx, punch bx, incisional bx, excisional bx, or complete excisional bx, called microstaging
- **N category** – physical exam and imaging only
- **M category** – follows Chapter 1

Rationale of differences from Chapter 1 and rules

- The general rules still apply since the full excision of the lesion is the proper medical procedure for a suspected melanoma lesion given that the depth of invasion is critical knowledge. Transecting the melanoma can make it difficult to ascertain the accurate thickness when putting this information together with the definitive surgical treatment. That is why there is a slight difference in melanoma where most of the tumor, or sometimes all of the tumor, is removed through the diagnostic biopsy.
- The initial biopsy, even a complete excisional biopsy, is not considered definitive treatment.
- Chapter 1 states: The clinical stage assigned on the basis of information obtained prior to cancer-directed treatment is not changed on the basis of subsequent information obtained from the pathologic examination of resected tissue or from information obtained after initiation of definitive therapy. (page 10 in the AJCC 7th edition manual)
- The N category is restricted to only physical exam and imaging, and that disease specific rule takes precedence over Chapter 1 which allows biopsies of nodes.

PATHOLOGIC CLASSIFICATION

Rules

- **General:** includes all information from the time of diagnosis (clinical stage), with the surgeon's operative findings, and the pathology report from the resected specimen
- **T category** – now includes the definitive treatment specimen, as well as the clinical biopsy information
- **N category** – sentinel node biopsy, partial lymphadenectomy, or complete lymphadenectomy along with the information from the clinical exam and imaging
- **M category** - follows Chapter 1

Rationale of differences from Chapter 1 and rules

- The wide-excision or re-excision of the melanoma is considered the definitive treatment.
- This treatment information cannot be used to change the clinical stage due to the Chapter 1 rule cited above.
- The N category for pathologic staging follows Chapter 1 rules