Protocol for the Examination of Specimens From Patients With Carcinoma of the Distal Extrahepatic Bile Ducts

Protocol applies to all invasive carcinomas of the distal extrahepatic bile ducts. Well-differentiated neuroendocrine neoplasms (carcinoid tumors) are not included. Carcinomas of the perihilar bile ducts are not included.

Based on AJCC/UICC TNM, 7th edition
Protocol web posting date: October 2009

Procedures
• Local or Segmental Bile Duct Resection
• Pancreaticoduodenectomy

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Surgical Pathology Cancer Case Summary (Checklist)

Protocol web posting date: October 2009

DISTAL EXTRAHEPATIC BILE DUCTS: Local or Segmental Resection, Pancreaticoduodenectomy (Note A)

Select a single response unless otherwise indicated.

Specimen (select all that apply)
___ Common bile duct
___ Right hepatic duct
___ Left hepatic duct
___ Junction of right and left hepatic ducts
___ Common hepatic duct
___ Cystic duct
___ Not specified

Other Organs Received
___ Stomach
___ Duodenum
___ Pancreas
___ Ampulla
___ Gallbladder
___ Other (specify): __________________________________

Procedure
___ Pancreaticoduodenectomy
___ Segmental resection of bile ducts(s)
___ Choledochal cyst resection (Note B)
___ Other (specify): __________________________________
___ Not specified

Tumor Site (select all that apply)
___ Common bile duct
    ___ Extrapancreatic
    ___ Intrapancreatic
___ Other (specify): ________________________________
___ Not specified

Tumor Size
Greatest dimension: ___ cm
*Additional dimensions: ___ x ___ cm
___ Cannot be determined (see Comment)
Histologic Type (Note C)
___ Adenocarcinoma (not otherwise characterized)
___ Papillary adenocarcinoma
___ Mucinous adenocarcinoma
___ Clear cell adenocarcinoma
___ Signet-ring cell carcinoma
___ Adenosquamous carcinoma
___ Squamous cell carcinoma
___ Small cell carcinoma
___ Large cell neuroendocrine carcinoma
___ Biliary cystadenocarcinoma
___ Other (specify): ____________________________
___ Carcinoma, type cannot be determined

Histologic Grade (Note D)
___ Not applicable
___ GX: Cannot be assessed
___ G1: Well differentiated
___ G2: Moderately differentiated
___ G3: Poorly differentiated
___ G4: Undifferentiated

Microscopic Tumor Extension (select all that apply)
___ Carcinoma in situ
___ Tumor confined to the bile duct histologically
___ Tumor invades beyond the wall of the bile duct
___ Tumor invades the duodenum
___ Tumor invades the pancreas
___ Tumor invades the gallbladder
___ Tumor invades other adjacent structures (specify): ________________________

Margins (select all that apply) (Note E)

Segmental Resection Specimen
___ Cannot be assessed
___ Margins uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
   Distance of invasive carcinoma from closest margin: ___ mm
   Specify margin: ____________________________
___ Margins involved by invasive carcinoma
   ___ Proximal bile duct margin
   ___ Distal bile duct margin
   ___ Other (specify): ____________________________
___ Dysplasia/carcinoma in situ not identified at bile duct margin
___ Dysplasia/carcinoma in situ present at bile duct margin

* Data elements with asterisks are not required. However, these elements may be clinically important but are not yet validated or regularly used in patient management.
Pancreaticoduodenal Resection Specimen

**Proximal Margin (Gastric or Duodenal)**

___ Cannot be assessed
___ Uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
___ Involved by invasive carcinoma

**Distal Margin (Distal Duodenal)**

___ Cannot be assessed
___ Uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
___ Involved by invasive carcinoma

**Pancreatic Retroperitoneal Margin**

___ Not applicable
___ Cannot be assessed
___ Uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
___ Involved by invasive carcinoma (tumor present 0-1 mm from margin)

**Bile Duct Margin**

___ Not applicable
___ Cannot be assessed
___ Margin uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
___ Margin involved by invasive carcinoma

**Distal Pancreatic Margin**

___ Not applicable
___ Cannot be assessed
___ Margin uninvolved by invasive carcinoma
___ Margin involved by invasive carcinoma

If all margins uninvolved by invasive carcinoma:
Distance of invasive carcinoma from closest margin: ___ mm OR ___ cm

Specify margin: __________________________

**Lymph-Vascular Invasion (Note F)**

___ Not identified
___ Present
___ Indeterminate

**Perineural Invasion (Note F)**

___ Not identified
___ Present
___ Indeterminate
Pathologic Staging (pTNM) (Note G)

TNM Descriptors (required only if applicable) (select all that apply)
___ m (multiple primary tumors)
___ r (recurrent)
___ y (posttreatment)

Primary Tumor (pT)
___ pTX: Cannot be assessed
___ pT0: No evidence of primary tumor
___ pTis: Carcinoma in situ
___ pT1: Tumor confined to the bile duct histologically
___ pT2: Tumor invades beyond the wall of the bile duct
___ pT3: Tumor invades the gallbladder, pancreas, duodenum, or other adjacent organs without involvement of the celiac axis or the superior mesenteric artery
___ pT4: Tumor involves the celiac axis or the superior mesenteric artery

Regional Lymph Nodes (pN)
___ pNX: Cannot be assessed
___ pN0: No regional lymph node metastasis
___ pN1: Regional lymph node metastasis
Specify: Number examined ___
Number involved ___

Distant Metastasis (pM)
___ Not applicable
___ pM1: Distant metastasis
*Specify site(s), if known: _________________________

*Additional Pathologic Findings (select all that apply) (Note H)
*___ None identified
*___ Choledochal cyst
*___ Dysplasia
*___ Primary sclerosing cholangitis
*___ Stones
*___ Other (specify): ___________________________

*Ancillary Studies
*Specify: ______________________________________

*Clinical History (select all that apply)
*___ Primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC)
*___ Inflammatory bowel disease
*___ Biliary stones
*___ Other (specify): ___________________________

*Comment(s)
Explanatory Notes

A. Application
Tumors arising in the biliary tree are classified into three groups: intrahepatic, perihilar, and distal (Figure 1). Perihilar tumors are defined as those involving the hepatic duct bifurcation or extrahepatic biliary tree proximal to the origin of the cystic duct; \(^1\) distal tumors as those lesions arising between the junction of the cystic duct-bile duct and the ampulla of Vater. \(^2\) This protocol applies only to cancers arising in the distal extrahepatic bile ducts above the ampulla of Vater (Figure 1) and includes malignant tumors that develop in congenital choledochal cysts and tumors that arise in the intrapancreatic portion of the common bile duct. It does not include low-grade neuroendocrine neoplasms (carcinoids) or tumors arising in the ampulla of Vater. Carcinomas arising in the cystic duct are grouped for staging purposes with carcinomas of the gallbladder (see Protocol for Examination of Specimens with Carcinomas of the Gallbladder). Tumors arising within the intrahepatic bile ducts or perihilar bile ducts are classified and staged using the liver tumor protocol or the perihilar bile duct protocol. Tumors of the pancreas and ampulla of Vater are classified separately.

![Anatomy of the biliary system](image)

Figure 1. Anatomy of the biliary system.

B. Choledochal Cyst
Carcinomas may arise in choledochal cysts (congenital cystic dilatation or duplications) of the bile duct. Histologically, they are classified in the same way as those arising in the gallbladder or bile ducts. Stones may be found in these cysts. If dysplasia or carcinoma in situ is found on initial microscopic sections, then multiple additional sections should be examined to exclude invasive cancer in other areas of the cyst.

C. Histologic Type
For consistency in reporting, the histologic classification published by the World Health Organization (WHO), shown below, is recommended. \(^3\) However, this protocol does not preclude the use of other systems of classification or histologic types. By WHO
convention, the term "cholangiocarcinoma" is reserved for carcinomas arising in the intrahepatic bile ducts (see intrahepatic bile ducts protocol).

Some histologic types of extrahepatic bile duct carcinoma are prognostically significant; papillary carcinomas, which are often polypoid on macroscopic examination, have the best prognosis. High-grade tumors, such as signet-ring cell carcinomas, small cell carcinomas, and undifferentiated carcinomas, are associated with a poorer prognosis when compared with adenocarcinoma. Many of the special subtypes, such as clear cell adenocarcinoma, are rarely encountered.

**WHO Classification of Carcinoma of the Extrahepatic Bile Ducts**

Adenocarcinoma  
Papillary adenocarcinoma  
Adenocarcinoma, intestinal type  
Adenocarcinoma, gastric foveolar type  
Mucinous adenocarcinoma  
Clear cell adenocarcinoma  
Signet-ring cell carcinoma  
Adenosquamous carcinoma  
Squamous cell carcinoma  
Small cell carcinoma  
Large cell neuroendocrine carcinoma  
Undifferentiated carcinoma  
Biliary cystadenocarcinoma

# These histologic types are not usually graded.

## By convention, signet-ring cell carcinomas are assigned grade 3 (see below).

### Small cell carcinomas and undifferentiated (histologic type) carcinomas are assigned grade 4 (see below).

**D. Histologic Grade**

For adenocarcinomas, a quantitative grading system based on the proportion of gland formation within the tumor is suggested and shown below.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Grade cannot be assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well differentiated (greater than 95% of tumor composed of glands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Moderately differentiated (50% to 95% of tumor composed of glands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Poorly differentiated (less than 50% of tumor composed of glands)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions corresponding to the above histologic grades are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Composed entirely of glands or has less than 5% solid or cordlike growth patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Has more than 5% but less than 50% solid or cordlike growth patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Has 50% to 100% solid or cordlike growth patterns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For squamous cell carcinomas, a rare tumor type in the extrahepatic bile ducts, a suggested grading system is shown below. If there are variations in the differentiation within the tumor, the highest (least favorable) grade is recorded.

Grade X  Grade cannot be assessed
Grade 1  Well differentiated
Grade 2  Moderately differentiated
Grade 3  Poorly differentiated

Note: Tumors with no differentiation or minimal differentiation that is discernible only in rare tiny foci (undifferentiated carcinomas by WHO classification) are categorized as grade 4.

E. Margins
Locoregional recurrence, as opposed to distant metastases, is usually the first site of disease recurrence and is often related to residual tumor located in the proximal or distal surgical margins of the bile duct or from tumor located along the dissected soft-tissue margin in the portal area. Local recurrence (usually at the surgical margins) can be attributed in many cases to tumor spread longitudinally along the duct wall and to perineural and lymph-vascular invasion.

Complete surgical resection with microscopically negative surgical margins is an important predictor of outcome in multivariate analysis for both perihilar and distal bile duct carcinomas, with overall 5-year survival for distal tumor improved from roughly 10% for patients with positive margins to 27% for those with negative resection margins.

Malignant tumors of the extrahepatic bile ducts are often multifocal. Therefore, microscopic foci of carcinoma or intraepithelial neoplasia may be found at the margin(s) even though the main tumor mass has been resected. In some cases it may be difficult to evaluate margins on frozen section preparations because of inflammation and reactive change of the surface epithelium or within the intramural mucous glands. If surgical margins are free of carcinoma, the distance between the closest margin and the tumor edge should be measured.

Because 5% of patients with bile duct carcinoma have synchronous carcinomas of the gallbladder, examination of the entire surgical specimen, including the gallbladder, is advised.

F. Perineural and Vascular/Lymphatic Invasion
Perineural and lymphatic invasion are common in extrahepatic bile duct carcinomas, although they are found less often in early stage cancers (11%). They should be specifically evaluated because they are associated with adverse outcome on univariate analysis. Although perineural invasion is sometimes useful for distinguishing carcinoma from nonneoplastic glands, caution should be used in interpretation of this finding in ducts affected by primary sclerosing cholangitis because perineural invasion by benign hyperplastic intramural glands has been reported in this setting and in adenomatous hyperplasia.
G. TNM and Anatomic Stage/Prognostic Groupings

Surgical resection is the most effective therapy for extrahepatic biliary tract carcinomas, and the best estimation of prognosis is related to the anatomic extent (stage) of disease at the time of resection. In particular, lymph node metastases are predictors of poorer outcome.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^11\)

For malignant tumors of the distal extrahepatic bile ducts, the TNM staging system of the American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC) and the International Union Against Cancer (UICC) is recommended.\(^2\) The staging system also applies to tumors arising in choledochal cysts.

According to AJCC/UICC convention, the designation "T" refers to a primary tumor that has not been previously treated. The designation "p" refers to the pathologic classification of the TNM, as opposed to the clinical classification, and is based on gross and microscopic examination. pT entails a resection of the primary tumor or biopsy adequate to evaluate the highest pT category, pN entails removal of nodes adequate to validate lymph node metastasis, and pM implies microscopic examination of distant lesions. Clinical classification (cTNM) is usually carried out by the referring physician before treatment during initial evaluation of the patient or when pathologic classification is not possible.

Pathologic staging is usually performed after surgical resection of the primary tumor. Pathologic staging depends on pathologic documentation of the anatomic extent of disease, whether or not the primary tumor has been completely removed. If a biopsied tumor is not resected for any reason (eg, when technically infeasible) and if the highest T and N categories or the M1 category of the tumor can be confirmed microscopically, the criteria for pathologic classification and staging have been satisfied without total removal of the primary cancer.

**TNM Descriptors**

For identification of special cases of TNM or pTNM classifications, the “m” suffix and “y,” “r,” and “a” prefixes are used. Although they do not affect the stage grouping, they indicate cases needing separate analysis.

The “m” suffix indicates the presence of multiple primary tumors in a single site and is recorded in parentheses: pT(m)NM.

The “y” prefix indicates those cases in which classification is performed during or after initial multimodality therapy (ie, neoadjuvant chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or both chemotherapy and radiation therapy). The cTNM or pTNM category is identified by a “y” prefix. The ycTNM or ypTNM categorizes the extent of tumor actually present at the time of that examination. The “y” categorization is not an estimate of tumor before multimodality therapy (ie, before initiation of neoadjuvant therapy).

The “r” prefix indicates a recurrent tumor when staged after a documented disease-free interval and is identified by the “r” prefix: rTNM.

The “a” prefix designates the stage determined at autopsy: aTNM.
**T Category Considerations** (Figures 2 and 3)

**pTis.** For bile duct carcinomas, "carcinoma in situ" (pTis) as a staging term includes neoplastic cells cytologically indistinguishable from invasive carcinoma but confined within the glandular basement membrane.\(^7\) Separation of high-grade dysplasia from carcinoma in situ is subjective and, because morphologic criteria are ill defined, is subject to interobserver variability. The term "carcinoma in situ" is not widely applied to glandular neoplastic lesions in the gastrointestinal tract but is retained for tumor registry reporting purposes as specified by law in many states. Noninvasive bile duct carcinomas with a papillary growth pattern are classified as pTis.

**pT2 and pT3.** Because the histology of the extrahepatic biliary tree varies along its length, with little smooth muscle in the wall of the proximal ducts as compared with the distal bile duct, assessment of depth of tumor invasion may be difficult. In addition to the problem caused by lack of discrete tissue boundaries, inflammatory changes in the bile ducts and desmoplastic stromal response to tumor may cause distortion. To overcome these difficulties, it has been proposed that the pathologist measure the depth of invasion of tumor from the basal lamina of normal epithelium to the point of deepest tumor invasion;\(^12\) however, this system has not yet been widely adopted for staging purposes.

**Figure 2.** T1 tumors are confined, histologically, to the bile duct. From Greene et al.\(^13\) Used with permission of the American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC), Chicago, Illinois. The original source for this material is the *AJCC Cancer Staging Atlas* (2006) published by Springer Science and Business Media LLC, [www.springerlink.com](http://www.springerlink.com).
Vessel Invasion
According to AJCC/UICC convention, vessel invasion (lymphatic or venous) does not affect the T category indicating local extent of tumor unless specifically included in the definition of a T category.

N Category Considerations
The regional nodes for distal bile duct carcinomas are the same as those for carcinomas of the pancreatic head and include the following: lymph nodes along the common bile duct, hepatic artery, and celiac trunk; posterior and anterior pancreaticoduodenal nodes; and nodes along the superior mesenteric vein and the right lateral wall of the superior mesenteric artery.

Tumor involvement of other nodal groups is considered distant metastasis. Anatomic division of regional lymph nodes is not necessary, but separately submitted lymph nodes should be reported as submitted. A minimum number of lymph nodes examined for accurate staging has not been determined, but examination of at least 12 lymph nodes is suggested.²

Routine assessment of regional lymph nodes is limited to conventional pathologic techniques (gross assessment and histologic examination), and data are currently insufficient to recommend special measures to detect micrometastasis or isolated tumor cells. Thus, neither multiple levels of paraffin blocks nor the use of special/ancillary techniques, such as immunohistochemistry, are recommended for routine examination of regional lymph nodes.

Stage Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>T Category</th>
<th>N Category</th>
<th>M Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tis</td>
<td>N0</td>
<td>M0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>N0</td>
<td>M0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>N0</td>
<td>M0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIA</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>N0</td>
<td>M0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage IIB  
T1  N1  M0  
T2  N1  M0  
T3  N1  M0  
Stage III  
T4  Any N  M0  
Stage IV  Any T  Any N  M1

# M0 is defined as no distant metastasis.

**H. Additional Findings**

Chronic inflammatory conditions affecting the bile ducts are associated with higher risk for biliary tract carcinomas. The most common risk factor for cholangiocarcinoma of the extrahepatic bile ducts in Western countries is primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC), characterized by multifocal strictures and inflammation of the extrahepatic and intrahepatic biliary tree. Patients with PSC are at risk for multifocal biliary carcinomas. In Japan and Southeast Asia, hepatolithiasis due to recurrent pyogenic cholangitis with biliary stones is a more common risk factor for biliary malignancy. Biliary parasites such as *Clonorchis sinensis* and *Opisthorchis viverrini*, prevalent in parts of Asia, are also associated with carcinomas of the extrahepatic bile ducts.

**References**

