

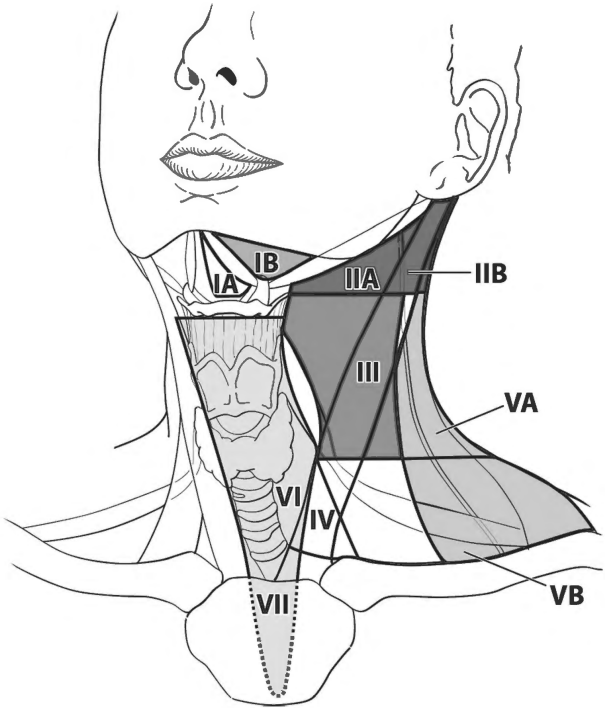
nodes in the head and neck are subdivided into specific anatomic subsites and grouped into seven levels for ease of description (Fig. 5.1, Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

In addition to the standard groups listed in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, other lymph node groups are defined by their specific anatomic location. Numbers of nodes are counted toward N category, but they are listed separately using the following descriptors.

- Suboccipital
- Retropharyngeal
- Parapharyngeal
- Buccinator (facial)
- Preauricular
- Periparotid and intraparotid

### Other General Rules for Assessing Regional Lymph Nodes

Histopathologic examination is necessary to exclude the presence of tumor in lymph nodes for pathological categorization (pN0). No imaging study (as yet) can identify microscopic tumor foci in regional nodes or distinguish between small reactive nodes and small malignant nodes.



**Fig. 5.1** Schematic indicating the location of the lymph node levels in the neck as described in Table 5.1

**Table 5.1** Anatomical structures defining the boundaries of the neck levels and sublevels

Boundary Level	Superior	Inferior	Anterior (medial)	Posterior (lateral)
IA	Symphysis of the mandible	Body of the hyoid	Anterior belly of the contralateral digastric muscle	Anterior belly of the ipsilateral digastric muscle
IB	Body of the mandible	Posterior belly of the digastric muscle	Anterior belly of the digastric muscle	Stylohyoid muscle
IIA	Skull base	Horizontal plane defined by the inferior border of the hyoid bone	Stylohyoid muscle	Vertical plane defined by the spinal accessory nerve
IIB	Skull base	Horizontal plane defined by the inferior body of the hyoid bone	Vertical plane defined by the spinal accessory nerve	Lateral border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle
III	Horizontal plane defined by the inferior body of the hyoid	Horizontal plane defined by the inferior border of the cricoid cartilage	Lateral border of the sternohyoid muscle	Lateral border of the sternocleidomastoid or sensory branches of the cervical plexus
IV	Horizontal plane defined by the inferior border of the cricoid cartilage	Clavicle	Lateral border of the sternohyoid muscle	Lateral border of the sternocleidomastoid or sensory branches of the cervical plexus
VA	Apex of the convergence of the sternocleidomastoid and trapezius muscles	Horizontal plane defined by the lower border of the cricoid cartilage	Posterior border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle or sensory branches of the cervical plexus	Anterior border of the trapezius muscle
VB	Horizontal plane defined by the lower border of the cricoid cartilage	Clavicle	Posterior border of the sternocleidomastoid muscle	Anterior border of the trapezius muscle
VI	Hyoid bone	Suprasternal notch	Common carotid artery	Common carotid artery
VII	Suprasternal notch	Innominate artery	Sternum	Trachea, esophagus, and prevertebral fascia

Modified from Robbins KT, Clayman G, Levine PA, et al.,<sup>13</sup> with permission from the American Medical Association.