

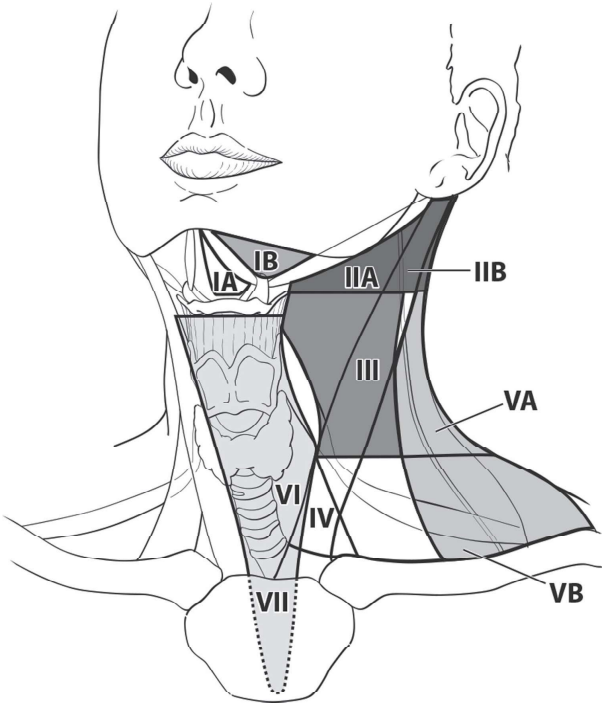
nodes in the head and neck are subdivided into specific anatomic subsites and grouped into seven levels for ease of description (Fig. 5.1, Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

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.