

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Cetuximab for the treatment of locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when **cetuximab** should be used to treat people with locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.



This may not be the only possible treatment for locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

Cetuximab in combination with radiotherapy is recommended as a possible treatment for people with locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck if:

- they have a Karnofsky performance-status score of 90% or more, and
- all forms of platinum-based chemotherapy are considered inappropriate.

Healthcare professionals should not stop prescribing cetuximab in combination with radiotherapy for people who were already receiving it when the guidance was issued, but who do not fulfil the above criteria. These patients should be able to carry on taking cetuximab until they and their healthcare professionals decide that it is the right time to stop treatment.

When assessing Karnofsky performance-status score, healthcare professionals should take into account any disabilities that might affect a person's ability to carry out daily activities.

Locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck

The cells that line parts of the body like the mouth and nose are called the 'epithelium'. Squamous cell cancer of the head and neck is cancer of the epithelium of the mouth, nose, throat and surrounding areas. Cancer is described as locally advanced when it has spread to the surrounding tissues.

Karnofsky performance status is a measure of someone's ability to carry out daily activities. A person with a score of 100% would have no signs of disease and would be able to carry out everyday tasks normally. Someone with a score of 90% would show some signs of disease, but they would still be able to carry out everyday tasks as normal.

Cetuximab

Cetuximab (also called Erbitux) is a drug that stops cancer cells from multiplying. It is given through a drip into a vein.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if you have locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck, you have a Karnofsky performance-status score of 90% or more, all forms of platinum-based chemotherapy are inappropriate for you and your doctor thinks that cetuximab is the right treatment for you, you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you appear to be eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

If you are already taking cetuximab with radiotherapy for locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck but you do not fulfil the required criteria, you should be able to continue taking it until you and your healthcare professionals decide it is the right time to stop.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Cancerbackup, 0808 800 1234
www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Get A-Head, 0121 697 8371
www.getahead.org.uk
- Let's Face It, 01843 833 724
www.lets-face-it.org.uk
- Mouth Cancer Foundation, 01924 950 950
www.mouthcancerfoundation.org
- National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs, 020 7730 8585
www.nalc.ik.com

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/TA145

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N1609).

We encourage NHS and voluntary sector organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about locally advanced squamous cell cancer of the head and neck.