

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for chronic hepatitis C

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

This leaflet is about when **peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b)** and **ribavirin** should be used to treat people with chronic hepatitis C 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 hepatitis C but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

The information in this leaflet updates some of NICE's previous advice on treating chronic hepatitis C. It should be read together with the following leaflets (see pages 2 and 4 for further details):

- 'The use of interferon alfa, peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C' – TA75, available from www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA75
- 'Peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for the treatment of mild chronic hepatitis C' – TA106, available from www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA106

This leaflet does not describe hepatitis C or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on page 3.



This may not be the only possible treatment for hepatitis C.

Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What has NICE said?

NICE recommends peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin as a possible treatment for some people with chronic hepatitis C (see below).

NICE also recommends short courses of treatment with peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin for people whose hepatitis C has greatly improved within 4 weeks of starting treatment and who are suitable for short treatment courses.

Who can have peginterferon alfa plus ribavirin?

You should be able to have peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin if:

- you have been treated before with peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin, or with peginterferon alfa on its own, but your hepatitis C didn't improve, or improved but then got worse again **or**
- you also have an HIV infection.

Whether a person is suitable for a short course of treatment with peginterferon alfa plus ribavirin will depend on a number of factors, including the type of peginterferon alfa used (2a or 2b), what type of hepatitis C virus they have, how much virus is in their body, and how well the treatment is working. You can ask your specialist to explain whether a short treatment course might be appropriate for you.

These recommendations update some of those in the leaflets listed on page 1 about treating people with chronic hepatitis C, as follows:

- TA75: recommendations 1, 2 (for people who are suitable for a short treatment course) and 6 (first bullet only) in the section 'What has NICE recommended on interferon alfa, peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for treating chronic hepatitis C?'
- TA106: the final two bullets in the section 'What has NICE said about peginterferon alfa and ribavirin?'

The other recommendations in the previous leaflets still apply.

Why has NICE said this?

NICE looks at how well treatments work, and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS.

NICE recommended treatment with peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin because it has been shown to work and it is value for money.

NICE recommended short courses of treatment with peginterferon alfa (2a or 2b) plus ribavirin for some people because short courses work similarly to longer courses of treatment, and cost less.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver that is caused by the hepatitis C virus. Some people who catch the hepatitis C virus recover quickly, but most people develop a long-lasting infection. This is called chronic hepatitis C. People who have chronic hepatitis C may feel well for many years, but the virus can make them ill and cause damage to their liver if it isn't treated.

Peginterferon alfa and ribavirin

Peginterferon alfa is a drug used to treat hepatitis C. It works by reducing the amount of virus in the blood. There are two types: peginterferon alfa-2a and peginterferon alfa-2b. Peginterferon alfa is usually taken with another drug called ribavirin, but can be used on its own for people who can't take ribavirin.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have chronic hepatitis C, and you and your doctor think that peginterferon alfa plus ribavirin is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' on page 2), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see

www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with hepatitis C. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- British Liver Trust, 0800 652 7330
www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
- The Haemophilia Society, 0800 018 6068
www.haemophilia.org.uk
- The Hepatitis C Trust, 0845 223 4424
www.hepctrust.org.uk
- South Asian Health Foundation, 020 8846 7284
www.sahf.org.uk

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

NICE has also produced the following leaflets about treating chronic hepatitis C. They are available at www.nice.org.uk or from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote the relevant reference number):

- 'The use of interferon alfa, peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C' available from www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA75 (reference N0428).
- 'Peginterferon alfa and ribavirin for the treatment of mild chronic hepatitis C' available from www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA106 (reference N1100).

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the disease and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, 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/guidance/TA200

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N2303). The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.

We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about hepatitis C.