

Pembrolizumab for untreated metastatic or unresectable recurrent head and neck squamous cell carcinoma

Information for the public

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Pembrolizumab (Keytruda) is available on the NHS as a possible treatment for head and neck squamous cell carcinoma in adults, if:

- the cancer is metastatic and has not been treated before, or the cancer has come back (recurrent) and has not been treated since it came back
- the cancer cannot be operated on (unresectable)
- the tumour expresses a type of protein called PD-L1, with a score of 1 or more on a scale called the combined positive score, which measures PD-L1 expression
- it's given on its own, not in combination with other drugs
- it's stopped after 2 years of uninterrupted treatment, or earlier if the cancer worsens.

If you are not eligible for pembrolizumab but are already having it, you should be able to continue until you and your doctor decide when best to stop.

Is this treatment right for me?

Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns. Your family can be involved too, if you wish. Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Questions to think about

- How well does it work compared with other treatments?
- What are the risks or side effects? How likely are they?
- How will the treatment affect my day-to-day life?
- What happens if the treatment does not work?
- What happens if I do not want to have treatment? Are there other treatments available?

Information and support

The [NHS website](#) may be a good place to find out more.

These organisations can give you advice and support:

- [The Swallows Head and Neck Support Group](#), 01253 428 940
- [Cancer Research UK](#), 0808 800 4040
- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#), 0808 808 0000

You can also get support from your local [Healthwatch](#).

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