

Pembrolizumab for neoadjuvant and adjuvant treatment of resectable locally advanced head and neck squamous cell carcinoma

Information for the public

Published: 21 April 2026

www.nice.org.uk

Pembrolizumab (Keytruda) is available on the NHS. It is a possible treatment for resectable, locally advanced head and neck squamous cell carcinoma in adults whose tumours produce PD-L1 with a combined positive score of 1 or more. It can be used:

- before surgery (neoadjuvant treatment)
- then after surgery (adjuvant treatment) with radiotherapy, with or without cisplatin
- then by itself.

Resectable means that the cancer can be removed using surgery. Locally advanced means that it has spread to nearby tissues.

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. See [our webpage on shared decision making](#).

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

These organisations can give you advice and support:

- [Head and Neck Cancer UK](#), info@hancuk.org
- [The Swallows](#), info@theswallows.org.uk
- [Cancer Research UK](#), 0808 800 4040
- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#), 0808 808 0000.

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

NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-9440-3