

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Bendamustine for first treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

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

This leaflet is about when **bendamustine** should be used to treat people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia 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 chronic lymphocytic leukaemia but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe chronic lymphocytic leukaemia or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on the back page.



This may not be the only possible treatment for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. 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 bendamustine as a possible treatment for some people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia of Binet stage B or C (see below).

Who can have bendamustine?

You should be able to have bendamustine if:

- you have chronic lymphocytic leukaemia of Binet stage B or C that has not been treated before **and**
- you cannot have chemotherapy with a drug called fludarabine.

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 bendamustine because it works better than other treatments available on the NHS. Although it also costs more than other treatments, this was justified by the benefits it provided.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is a cancer of the white blood cells (lymphocytes). It is the most common form of adult leukaemia. The cancerous lymphocytes multiply in an uncontrolled way and stop normal white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets (blood fragments that help blood to clot) from working properly.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is given a Binet stage to describe how developed it is. At Binet stage B, the cancer cells cause three or more lymph glands (nodes) to enlarge, but do not cause low red blood cells (called anaemia) or low platelets (called thrombocytopenia). Binet stage C involves anaemia or thrombocytopenia, with any number of affected lymph nodes.

Bendamustine

Bendamustine (also known as Levact) is an anticancer drug used in chemotherapy. It works by attaching to the DNA in cancer cells so they stop multiplying.

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 lymphocytic leukaemia, and you and your doctor think that bendamustine 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 chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- CancerHelp UK, 0808 800 4040
www.cancerhelp.org.uk
- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia Support Association, 0800 977 4396
www.cllsupport.org.uk
- Leukaemia CARE, 0808 8 010 444
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.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.

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/TA216

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N2449). 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 chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.