

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Rituximab for the first-line 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 **rituximab** 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 anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe chronic lymphocytic leukaemia or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team 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?

Rituximab is recommended as a possible first treatment for people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia who are able to take fludarabine in combination with cyclophosphamide.

Rituximab should only be used in combination with fludarabine and cyclophosphamide.

Rituximab is not recommended in combination with any other chemotherapy agents as a first treatment for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

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

Rituximab

Rituximab (also known as MabThera) is a type of drug known as a monoclonal antibody. It 'recognises' and sticks to one type of lymphocyte known as B cells. These are then killed by the body's immune system. Rituximab sticks to normal and cancerous B cells and the immune system kills both types. However, once treatment has finished, the body starts to replace its normal cells.

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 your doctor thinks that rituximab, used in combination with fludarabine and cyclophosphamide, 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 the treatment 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.

- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia Support Association
0800 977 4396
www.clisupport.org.uk
- Leukaemia CARE, 0800 169 6680
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 2020
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 also 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, 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/TA174

*You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N1913). 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.