



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Merkel Cell Cancer

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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The causes of merkel cell cancer

Merkel cell cancers are a rare type of neuroendocrine tumour involving merkel cells, situated in the top layer of the skin.

As with other types of skin cancer long term exposure to sunlight increases your risk of developing merkel cell cancer.

Other factors that can increase your risk include:

- Ultraviolet light treatment, PUVA (psoralen ultraviolet treatment), for skin conditions such as psoriasis.
- Conditions or treatments that can weaken your immune system, including people who have had an organ transplant.

The symptoms of merkel cell cancer

Merkel cell cancer usually appears as a lump on the skin. The lumps are usually bluish red in colour and about 1 to 5 cm across, they may be larger. The skin over them is not usually broken (ulcerated). They are most often found in the areas of the body that get the most direct sun – the head, neck, arms and legs. Merkel cell cancer tends to grow quickly and can spread to other areas of the body.

Tests and staging for merkel cell cancer

Most people who are diagnosed with merkel cell carcinoma will need to have further tests to see if the cancer has spread.

You may be asked to have a:

- Chest X-ray
- Ultrasound scan
- Computed tomography (CT) scan
- Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography (PET-CT) scan
- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan.

Treatment for merkel cell cancer

If merkel cell cancer is only in the surface layers of skin, the main treatments are surgery and/or radiotherapy.

Merkel cell cancer is a rare cancer and therefore treatment will be discussed at a specialist regional skin cancer meeting. These meetings are held weekly at Leeds and Hull. Your treatment may be carried out at one of the regional centres or locally.

If there is a recommendation to proceed with surgery the aim will be to remove all of the cancer cells; you may hear the term 'clear margins'. The surgeon will send the tissue that they have removed to the laboratory where a pathologist will examine the specimen very closely to make sure there is a clear margin of healthy tissue around the cancer cells. Your doctor will also be able to explain whether or not you need to have any lymph nodes removed and whether you will need any further treatment or scans afterwards.

It is quite common for specialists to recommend radiotherapy after surgery. The aim of the radiotherapy is to kill off any cancer cells that may have been left behind, which are too small to be seen.

Following your treatment, you will be recommended a period of follow up during which you will have regular clinical reviews.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist Team, Specialist Nurse Office, Corridor A, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York. YO31 8HE.

Advice Line: 01904 721719

Email: yhs-tr.skincancer.cns.team@nhs.net

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Space for your notes and questions

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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