

Understanding Rare Skin Cancers

Merkel Cell Carcinoma

Information and support for patients and families



What this leaflet covers

This leaflet provides information about Merkel Cell Carcinoma (MCC) and the treatments that may be offered. It aims to answer some of the questions you or those close to you may have. It does not replace a conversation with your medical team, but it may help you better understand what is discussed.

If you were diagnosed at your local hospital, you may be referred to a specialist centre with expertise in treating and managing MCC.

If you have any further questions, please contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS). You should already have their contact details, but if not, please ask your doctor's secretary to provide them.

What is MCC?

Doctors used to think that MCC started in special skin cells called Merkel cells which help us feel light touch. However, experts now believe this may not be true with scientists still learning about MCC with different ideas about where it begins. Even though we don't know the exact starting point, we do know how to diagnose and treat it.

MCC is a rare type of skin cancer that appears as a firm, painless lump on the skin. It is much less common than other skin cancers, with only a small number of cases diagnosed each year in the UK. The condition occurs most often in older adults, particularly those over 50 and is more frequently seen in people with fair skin. It is also more likely to affect individuals with weakened immune systems, such as transplant recipients or people taking immunosuppressive medication.

MCC typically develops on areas of skin that have had significant sun exposure, although it can appear anywhere on the body, including the trunk and limbs. One of the key features of this cancer is that it can grow quickly and has the potential to spread, which is why recognising it promptly and starting treatment without delay is important.

Signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of MCC often include changes on the skin that appear suddenly and grow quickly, such as:

- A firm, painless lump on the skin
- A red, pink, or purple bump that may look shiny
- A spot that grows rapidly over weeks
- A lesion that bleeds or becomes ulcerated

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosing MCC usually begins with an examination of the skin by a specialist. If the specialist is concerned a sample of tissue is removed and examined under a microscope, as this is the only way to confirm the diagnosis. Once MCC is identified, further investigations such as a scan may be arranged to check whether the cancer has spread elsewhere.

At your appointments, you can expect the clinical team to explain each stage of the process and what the tests involve. You may meet several members of the specialist team, including dermatologists, surgeons, oncologists and your CNS. After your tests are completed, your case will be discussed at a Multidisciplinary Team meeting, where experts from different specialties review your results together and agree on the most appropriate treatment plan for you.

Tests and appointments are usually arranged promptly and you should be kept informed about the expected timelines. Your CNS is available throughout this process to answer questions, explain results and support you as you move towards treatment.

Treatment options

The treatment you have depends on:

- Where the MCC started and its size
- Whether it has spread
- Your general health and well being

MCC can be treated in different ways. These include surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or sometimes a mix of these treatments. Further treatment information will be provided if required.

You may also be considered for a **clinical trial** if one is available and suitable for you. If so, the team will explain the details so you can decide whether you would like to take part.

Your healthcare team will recommend the approach that is most appropriate for you.

After Treatment / Follow Up

After treatment for MCC, you will be followed up closely by your specialist team over the next five years. Follow up appointments are usually more frequent in the first few years, when the risk of the cancer returning is highest. These visits may include a physical examination, checks of the skin and lymph nodes and occasionally scans if your team feels they are needed. Your CNS will remain a key point of contact throughout this period and can help coordinate appointments and answer questions.

Your team will teach and encourage you to examine your skin and lymph nodes regularly at home. Things to look out for include:

- The original area becomes painful, swollen, or changes suddenly in appearance
- Any lump increasing in size quickly, rapidly growing or unusual skin changes anywhere on your body, even if they are not close to the original site
- You notice new lumps nearby (such as in the lymph nodes)

If you notice any of the symptoms above or anything that is causing you a concern, contact your CNS for further advice. Even if you are unsure whether a change is significant, it is always better to get it checked. Your team is there to support you and would rather hear from you early.

West Midlands Skin Cancer services / Trusts

Column 1	Column 2
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham (part of University Hospitals Birmingham - UHB) Headquarters Address: Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2GW Main switchboard: 0121 371 2000 Website: https://www.uhb.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 0121 371 6777 Email address: QEskincancerCNS@uhb.nhs.uk
Solihull, Good Hope and Heartlands Hospitals (part of University Hospital Birmingham - UHB) Solihull Hospital, Lode Lane, Solihull, B91 2JL Good Hope Hospital, Rectory Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, B75 7RR Heartlands Hospital, Bordesley Green, Birmingham, B9 5SS Main switchboard for all 3 Trusts: 0121 424 2000	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 0121 424 4523 Email address: hgsskincancercns@uhb.nhs.uk

Column 1	Column 2
Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust Address: Sandwell General Hospital, Lyndon, West Bromwich, B71 4HJ Switchboard: 0121 553 1831 Website: https://www.swbh.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 0121 507 4493
Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust (SaTH) Address: Mytton Oak Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 8XQ Main switchboard: 01743 261000 Website: https://www.sath.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01743 261267 (answerphone) or 01743 261107 (secretaries if urgent) Email address: sath.skincancernurses@nhs.net
South Warwickshire University NHS Foundation Trust Address: Warwick Hospital, Lakin Road, Warwick, CV34 5BW Website: https://www.swft.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01926 495321 Ext: 8284
The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust Address: Russells Hall Hospital, Pensnett Road, Dudley, DY1 2HQ Main switchboard: 01384 456111 Website: https://www.dgft.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01384 456 111 ext 3088

Column 1	Column 2
The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Address: New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton Road, Heath Town, Wolverhampton, WV10 0QP Main switchboard: 01902 307999 Website: https://www.royalwolverhampton.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01902 307999 ext 88583 Monday- Friday 8.30-4.30
University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire (UHCW) Address: University Hospital, Clifford Bridge Road, Coventry, CV2 2DX Main switchboard: 02476 964000 Website: https://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 02476 966085
University Hospitals of North Midlands (UHNM) Address: Royal Stoke University Hospital, Newcastle Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 6QG Main switchboard: 01782 715444 Website https://www.uhnm.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01782 676266

Column 1	Column 2
Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust Address: Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, Manor Hospital, Moat Road, Walsall, WS2 9PS Main switchboard: 01922 721172 Website: https://www.walsallhealthcare.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01922 603223 Email address: wht.skincancerpatientsupport@nhs.net
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust Address: Worcestershire Royal Hospital, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester, WR5 1DD Main switchboard: 01905 763333 Website: https://www.worcsacute.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01905 733876
Wye Valley NHS Trust Address: The County Hospital, Union Walk, Hereford, HR1 2ER Main switchboard: 01432 355444 Website: https://www.wyevalley.nhs.uk/	Skin Cancer Nursing Team: 01432 378942

Additional resources for patients:

MCC Online Support Group (International) -
[Support Resources for MCC](#)

Additional general cancer support services:

Macmillan Cancer Support - www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Support UK - <https://cancersupportuk.org/>

Cancer Research UK - [Cancer Research UK](#)

NIHR Be Part of Research -

[Patient and Public Resources - West Midlands Cancer Alliance](#)

West Midlands Cancer Alliance - Skin

[https://wmcanceralliance.nhs.uk/patients-area/
patient-information/2633-skin](https://wmcanceralliance.nhs.uk/patients-area/patient-information/2633-skin)

