

Plain English Summary

Denosumab for treating osteoporosis

What does the guidance say?

Denosumab is recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government subsidy for treating adults with osteoporosis who are at high risk of having a bone fracture.

Denosumab is not recommended for subsidy for treating glucocorticoid-associated bone loss.

What is osteoporosis?

Bone is a living tissue that is broken down and renewed all the time. Osteoporosis means “bones with holes”. It occurs when the body loses more bone tissue than it can replace, causing bones to become weak and thin. This increases the risk of bones breaking (fractures).

Osteoporosis affects both men and women but is most common in post-menopausal women. Many people with osteoporosis have no symptoms until the weakened bones cause painful fractures, usually in the hip, wrist or spine.

People with osteoporosis can make lifestyle changes and take treatments to prevent further bone loss and reduce the risk of bone fractures.

What is glucocorticoid-associated bone loss?

Bone loss can also occur after taking certain medicines, known as glucocorticoids (a type of steroid), for a long time. This is known as glucocorticoid-associated bone loss. Steroids can reduce the body's ability to absorb calcium and vitamin D to build bones and can increase the risk of fractures.

What is denosumab?

Denosumab belongs to a group of medicines called biologics, which stop bone tissue from breaking down, and help treat osteoporosis and prevent bone loss. It is given as an injection under the skin, usually if oral treatments (bisphosphonates) are unsuitable.

Your doctor will tell you how much you need to take and how long you need to take it for.

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Who can have denosumab?

Adults with osteoporosis can have denosumab if they are at high risk of having a bone fracture.

Your doctor can advise if denosumab is a suitable treatment for you.

Why was denosumab recommended for MAF?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Denosumab was recommended because its benefits in treating patients with osteoporosis who are at high risk of fracture justify its costs.

Using denosumab to treat bone loss because of long-term treatment with glucocorticoids was not recommended for subsidy as its benefits for this condition are uncertain.

What does listing on MAF mean for me?

The MAF helps people pay for expensive treatments that are clinically necessary. If your doctor prescribes denosumab for you, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

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