

Plain English Summary

Rituximab for treating non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

What does the guidance say?

Rituximab biosimilar (Truxima) is recommended for listing on the Standard Drug List (SDL) for government subsidy for adults with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma or chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

Rituximab reference biologic (MabThera) is not recommended for subsidy.

What is non-Hodgkin's lymphoma?

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (also known as NHL) is a cancer that starts in white blood cells (lymphocytes) and affects the body's lymphatic system. The cancer cells grow in an uncontrolled way and stop normal white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets from working properly.

NHL is a term used for many different types of lymphoma. Your doctor will be able to explain to you what type of lymphoma you have. Treatment for NHL depends on what type of lymphocyte is affected (B cells or T cells) and how fast the cancer cells are growing and spreading.

What is chronic lymphocytic leukaemia?

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (also known as CLL) is the most common form of adult leukaemia (cancer of white blood cells). In CLL, the leukaemia cells often multiply slowly, and many people do not have any symptoms for a number of years. Over time, the cells grow and spread to other parts of the body, including the lymph nodes, liver and spleen.

What is Truxima?

Truxima is a biosimilar of a biologic drug called rituximab (MabThera). It attaches to a protein called CD20 on the surface of leukaemia and lymphoma cells so the body's immune system can identify them and destroy them. Truxima is given as an infusion in your vein.

Biologics are medicines that contain active ingredients extracted from living organisms. Biosimilars are also biologics. They are highly similar, but not identical to, their reference biologics (i.e. the first biologic developed). Biosimilars have similar effectiveness, safety and quality records compared to their reference biologics and are used to treat the same diseases.

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Who can have Truxima?

Adults can have Truxima if they have:

- CD20-positive diffuse large B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;
- Indolent B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphomas;
- Stage III-IV follicular lymphoma; or
- CD20-positive chronic lymphocytic leukaemia.

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

Why was Truxima recommended for subsidy?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Truxima (rituximab biosimilar) was recommended because its benefit in improving survival and quality of life for certain patients with NHL and CLL justifies its cost.

MabThera (rituximab reference biologic) will no longer be subsidised because its benefits do not justify its cost compared to Truxima. Patients will have six months to switch from MabThera to Truxima or an alternative treatment before MabThera is no longer subsidised.

What does listing on SDL mean for me?

Truxima has been listed on the Standard Drug List (SDL). Drugs on SDL are subsidised at 50% for all Singaporean citizens who are treated in a public healthcare institution. Patients from lower to middle income households may received a higher subsidy of up to 75%.

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The Agency for Care Effectiveness (ACE) was established by the Ministry of Health (Singapore) to drive better decision-making in healthcare through health technology assessment (HTA), clinical guidance and education. It publishes guidances on diagnosing, treating, and preventing different medical conditions based on the latest research information available worldwide.

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