

NCPE Assessment

Plain English Summary

February 2026

Drug name: Pembrolizumab (pronounced pem-broh-LIH-zoo-mab) as monotherapy for the adjuvant treatment of adults with non-small cell lung carcinoma who are at a high risk of recurrence following complete resection and platinum-based chemotherapy

Brand name: Keytruda®

HTA ID: 23078

What is the NCPE?

The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) is a team of experts who look at the health benefits and costs of medicines. The HSE asks us to advise on whether or not a new medicine is good value for money. We give unbiased advice to help the HSE provide the most effective, safe and cost-effective (value for money) treatments for patients.

How do we make our recommendations?

Our main focus is on the health benefits and cost effectiveness of a medicine. We look at the wider costs and health benefits associated with a new medicine, for example:

- Does the new medicine work better than other treatments available in Ireland?
- Is the new medicine easier to give or easier to take compared with other treatments available in Ireland?
- Does the new medicine reduce the need for patients to be hospitalised?
- Does the new medicine improve the quality of a patient's life over other treatments available in Ireland?
- Will the new medicine save resources elsewhere within the health system?

We review the information from clinical trials along with the cost and value for money data presented by the pharmaceutical company. We ask doctors and other healthcare professionals for advice about any health benefits of the new medicine compared with current treatments. We also ask patient organisations to send us their views on how the new drug may improve patients' day-to-day experience of living with a disease.

What is pembrolizumab used for?

Pembrolizumab is a cancer medicine used to treat many different types of cancer. In this submission we are considering the use of pembrolizumab in adult patients with non-small cell lung cancer. In this submission pembrolizumab is an adjuvant treatment, which means it is used to help prevent the cancer from coming back after patients have surgery to remove the cancer. Pembrolizumab should be given after platinum-based chemotherapy.

Non-small cell lung cancer tumours express certain levels of protein known as PD-L1. These levels are measured as a PD-L1 tumour proportion score. In this submission pembrolizumab can be given to patients regardless of their PD-L1 levels.

What recommendation has the NCPE made to the HSE?

We have recommended that the HSE should consider not funding pembrolizumab for the adjuvant treatment of patients with non-small cell lung cancer unless its cost-effectiveness (value for money) can be improved. However, we recommend that pembrolizumab is not considered for use in patients who have a PD-L1 tumour proportion score of greater than or equal to 50%. This is because a more effective treatment is available for patients who have a PD-L1 tumour proportion score of greater than or equal to 50%.

The HSE will consider our recommendation and make the final decision about reimbursement (funding). When making the funding decision, the HSE will also consider the additional criteria outlined in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

We have received a Patient Organisation Submission from the Irish Lung Cancer Community about pembrolizumab and shared it with the HSE. This submission will form part of the data that the HSE considers.

Why did we make this recommendation?

After reviewing the data presented by the pharmaceutical company, we recommend that the HSE consider not providing this medicine unless the HSE can agree a suitable price reduction with the pharmaceutical company.

We believe the medicine may work as well or better than other ways to manage this condition in patients with a PD-L1 tumour proportion score of less than 50%. However, we believe a more effective treatment is available for patients with a PD-L1 tumour proportion score of equal to or greater than 50%.

Next steps

When the HSE receives our recommendation, it will look at all the relevant data about pembrolizumab. The HSE makes the final decision on reimbursement.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about pembrolizumab from the following online options:

- the NCPE Technical Summary Document
- Keytruda® European Public Assessment Report (EPAR) – [Summary for the public](#) or
- searching for pembrolizumab on our website (www.ncpe.ie);
- searching for pembrolizumab on the European Medicines Agency (EMA) website (www.ema.europa.eu).

Please refer to the NCPE website for updated information on the reimbursement status of this medicine