Merkel Cell Carcinoma

Fact Sheet

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Symptoms
Merkel cell carcinomas (MCC) commonly appear as a painless pink, red, or purple bump on the skin. They usually appear on areas of skin exposed to the sun, such as the face, neck, arms, and legs, but they can occur anywhere on the body. Sometimes the skin on the top of the tumor might break open and bleed.

Key Risk Factors
- Exposure to a lot of natural or artificial sunlight
- A weakened immune system due to diseases such as HIV or chronic lymphocytic leukemia
- Taking medication that suppresses the immune system (e.g., after an organ transplant)
- A history of other types of cancer
- Older age (≥ 50 years)
- Male gender
- Fair skin
- Infection with the Merkel cell polyomavirus, present in approximately 80% of MCC tumors

What is Merkel Cell Carcinoma?
Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is a rare and aggressive form of skin cancer.6 In MCC, malignant cells form in the top layer of the skin, close to the nerve endings that sense touch.3 Once the cancer starts to metastasize, or spread, to other parts of the body, it becomes metastatic MCC.3

Diagnosis and Prognosis
MCC is often misdiagnosed for other skin cancers and grows at an exponential rate on chronically sun-damaged skin.2 The prognosis for MCC is poor and worsens as the tumor metastasizes.11,12

Approximately 1,500 new cases of MCC diagnosed in the U.S.12

Approximately 2,500 new cases of MCC diagnosed in the E.U.13

Incidence
Epidemiologic data suggests that each year there are:

- Overall, metastatic disease is found in 5-11% of patients with MCC14,15,16

Treatment
While early-stage MCC can be generally managed with surgery, treatment options for metastatic MCC are severely limited.2,11 For these patients, there are no approved treatments once the initial treatment becomes ineffective.19,20 As such, the standard of care for patients with metastatic MCC is to enroll in clinical trials.11

Need for Further Research
Research is urgently needed to identify treatments for metastatic MCC which can improve the quality and duration of life for people living with metastatic MCC. Such treatments must induce significant and lasting tumor shrinkage not only at the site where MCC was first diagnosed, but also on parts of the body where the cancer has spread. To learn more about clinical trials in MCC, visit clinicaltrials.gov and search for ‘Merkel cell carcinoma.’
References


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