

Information for patients and carers

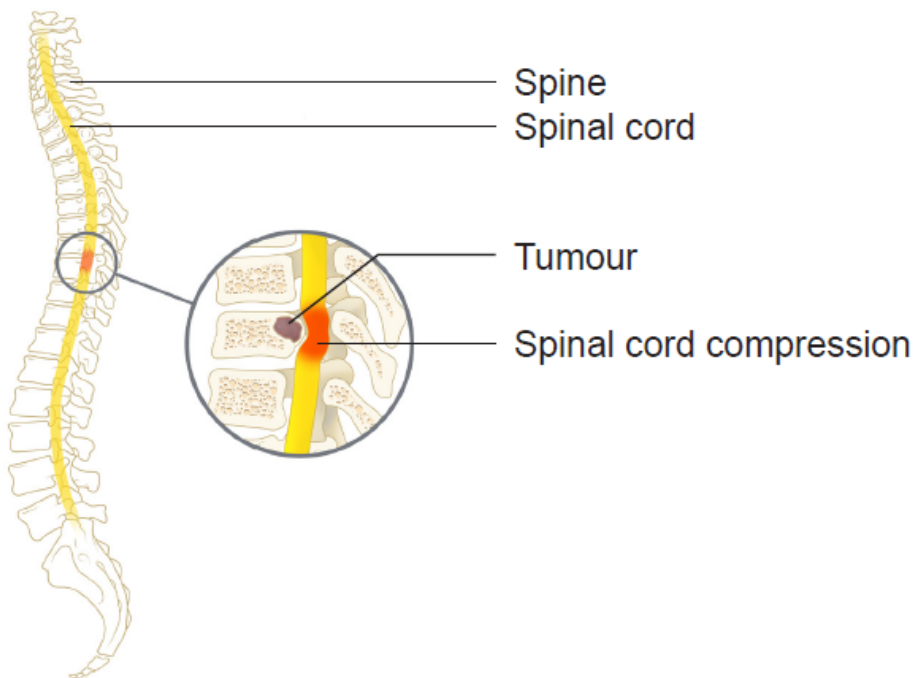
Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue. The top band is a light blue, the middle is a medium blue, and the bottom is a dark blue.

This information is about a rare condition called Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC) and is intended to help you recognise the symptoms and understand the importance of early detection.

MSCC is not common and only occurs in a small number of people, but early diagnosis is important as the earlier the treatments are started, the better the results usually are.

What is Spinal cord compression?



The spinal cord runs down the back from the brain and is protected by the bones of the spine (vertebrae).

When a cancerous tumour grows in or around these bones, it may cause pressure (compression) to the spinal cord.

If you have a type of cancer that has, or may, spread to a bone, you need to be aware of the symptoms of MSCC.

These symptoms are early warning signs and should be reported straight away so you may get treated quickly for better results and avoid possible, permanent damage.

What are the warning signs?

This depends on which part of the spine is affected but you may have pain in your neck or back before the following symptoms develop:

- Tingling / **pins and needles** down the spine into the arms and/or legs.
- Stiff / heavy legs that make walking difficult or possibly your legs feel like they **may give way**.
- **Numbness or changed sensation** in the legs, arms, fingers, toes, or chest and abdomen.
- **Weakness** in the arms and/or legs.
- **Bladder problems**: inability to pass urine or loss of control (incontinence).
- **Bowel problems**: inability to control bowels or constipation.
- A **band like pain** around the chest or abdomen which may radiate over the back into the buttocks or legs.

If you have any of these symptoms:

- Get immediate advice from a health care professional, such as: your cancer team at your hospital, your GP, or your specialist nurse.
- Describe your symptoms and explain that you are worried about spinal cord compression and need to be seen urgently.
- Show the health care professional this information leaflet.
- **DO NOT** delay in reporting these early warning signs.

What happens next?

A doctor needs to examine you and if MSCC is suspected, an urgent scan of your spine will be arranged. Steroids may be prescribed to reduce some of the swelling.

Surgery may be needed to relieve the pressure on your spine. Radiotherapy is another possible treatment option.

The oncology and specialist surgical teams will discuss the best treatment and options with you.

If you have spinal cord compression, you will be admitted to hospital and will have to lie flat in bed until treatment is completed. You may have to wear a collar if the top of your spine is affected.

Although it is a rare condition, spinal cord compression can lead to **permanent damage or even paralysis**. That is why early diagnosis and treatment is vital, to give the best chance of successful treatment.

Remember:

- **Seek advice if you develop any of the warning signs.**
- **Early diagnosis and treatment are vital to give the best chance of successful treatment.**

For the doctor or health care professional

- This patient has cancer and is therefore at risk of Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression.
- If they have any of the symptoms in this information leaflet, please consider MSCC as a possible diagnosis and discuss with the MSCC Coordinator.
- The MSCC co-ordinator is based at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals and can be contacted via Hospital switchboard (01772 716565) and requesting bleep number 2664

N.B. This telephone number is only for use by the Health Care Professional

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.

This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.

Department: Acute Oncology

Division: Oncology

Production date: April 2024

Review date: April 2027

Document Code and version: CA186 V2