Urgent Suspected Cancer Pathways for Children and Young People

Cheshire and Merseyside Guidance

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Version Control

Version	Version Date	Summary of Changes
1.0	July 2012	First iteration of pathway document
2.0	July 2018	Updated referral pathways
3.0	Nov 2024	Updated cancer wait times, updated suspected cancer pathways, addition of suspected breast lump or children with breast symptoms pathway, example of new children's suspected cancer referral form.

Distribution

Name of individual / group	Issue Date	Version
Children's Clinical Quality Group	DD/MM/YY	[VERSION]
Cheshire and Merseyside Paediatric Network	DD/MM/YY	[VERSION]
GP Clinical Quality Group (CQG)	DD/MM/YY	[VERSION]
Trust Cancer Manager	DD/MM/YY	[VERSION]
DGH Paediatric/POSCU Leads	DD/MM/YY	[VERSION]
Clinical leads for individual pathways		
Relevant disease specific CQG leads		

Approval

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Contents

1	. P	urpose of this Guidance	4
	1.1.	Background	4
	1.2.	Patient Population	4
2	. C	hildren's Cancer Pathways	5
	2.1.	Cancer Waiting Times	5
	2.2.	Regional Children's Cancer Pathways	5
	2.3.	Guidance for Urgency of Referral	3
	2.4.	Referral from secondary care into Alder Hey Oncology 6	
	2.5.	Rejection/Withdrawal of Urgent Suspected Cancer Referrals	3
3	. C	ommon Referrals	7
	3.1.	Lymphadenopathy	7
	3.2.	Breast Lumps and Breast Symptoms 7	
	3.3.	Skin	7
4	. A	ppendices	3
	4.1.	Appendix 1: Table of findings that may be associated with a cancer diagnosis in childhood .	3
	4.2.	Appendix 2: Example of Urgent Suspected Cancer Form for Suspected Children's Cancer 1	1
	4.3.	Appendix 3: Paediatric cervical lymphadenopathy pathway14	4
	4.	4 Appendix 4: Disease specific suspected cancer referral pathways	3

1. Purpose of this Guidance

1.1. Background

The aim of this guidance is to make clear the urgent suspected cancer referral pathways for children and young people (CYP) within the location of Cheshire and Merseyside, North Wales and Isle of Man. The proposed benefit of this will be to improve time to referral for those CYP with suspected cancer and therefore improve time to diagnosis and treatment.

For guidance on whether an immediate, very urgent or urgent suspected cancer referral in CYP is warranted the following guidance should be used:

- NICE Guideline NG12 'Suspected cancer: recognition and referral' (www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng12)
- Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) referral guidance for suspected cancer in children and young people (<u>Referral guidance (cclg.org.uk)</u>) Summary table in Appendix 1
- Links to relevant disease or symptom specific guidance can also be found on the Cheshire and Merseyside Cancer Alliance (CMCA) website.

1.2. Patient Population

The scope of this guidance is for patients aged 0-15years. Alder Hey Children's Hospital is a Principal Treatment Centre (PTC) for CYP 0-15 years and an associated PTC for teenage and young adult (TYA) patients 16-19 years. The referral process for the different age groups are as follows:

- CYP 0-15 years should be referred to local services or the Alder Hey Oncology Team depending upon the urgency of referral or symptom specific pathway*. Referrals should be made using the Urgent Suspected Cancer Form for Suspected Children's Cancer (Appendix 2).
- TYA 16-19 years should be given the choice of referral to local adult services or the TYA service at Alder Hey Children's Hospital. Referrals to Alder Hey should be made using the Urgent Suspected Cancer Form for Suspected Children's Cancer. Referral to adult services should be made via the local adult tumour specific pathway.

*Please see individual referral pathways for details

2. Children's Cancer Pathways

2.1. Cancer Waiting Times

The Cancer Wait Times review recommendations came into effect on 1st October 2023 and implemented the following targets:

- Faster Diagnosis Standard: Maximum 28-day wait to communication of definitive cancer / not cancer diagnosis for patients referred urgently (including those with breast symptoms) and from NHS cancer screening.
- Time to treatment: Recommendation for maximum 31-day time to treat from urgent suspected cancer referral (captured within the adult 62-day time to treatment target).

Although the recommendation for first review within 14 days of receipt of referral has been removed, the aim would be to review any new patient within this time frame. This is to facilitate diagnosis and commencement of treatment at the earliest opportunity from the point of suspicion of a cancer diagnosis.

2.2. Regional Children's Cancer Pathways

The NHS England Children's Cancer Network Service Specifications stipulate that clear referral pathways should be in place for CYP and TYA with suspected cancer. Regional referral pathways for the following have been agreed:

- Suspected solid tumours
- Suspected bone tumours
- Suspected brain or spinal cancer
- Suspected leukaemia
- Suspected retinoblastoma
- Suspected thyroid cancer
- Suspected skin cancer
- Suspected breast lump or children with breast symptoms

2.3. Guidance for Urgency of Referral

Criteria guiding urgency of referral are set out in NICE Guideline NG12 and the (CCLG) referral guidance for suspected cancer in children and young people. A summary table from the CCLG guidance is provided in Appendix 2. The urgency of referral is categorised as below:

- Immediate referral telephone referral within a few hours of initial review
- Very urgent review within 48 hours
- Urgent review within 2 weeks

If there is a high suspicion of cancer (Immediate/Very urgent referral) please contact the consultant oncologist on call at Alder Hey Children's Hospital via switchboard.

All other referrals should be made into local services using the CMCA Urgent Suspected Cancer Form for Children's Suspected Cancers (<u>https://www.nwchildrenscancerodn.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/USCR-14.03.25-Clean.docx</u> (Appendix 2)). Telephone advice can also be sought from the local general paediatrician on call and a referral form should follow any accepted referrals via the electronic patient referral system.

2.4. Referral from secondary care into Alder Hey Oncology

All referrals from secondary care should be made by telephone to the Oncology consultant on call. Telephone referrals should be followed promptly by a referral letter.

2.5. Rejection/Withdrawal of Urgent Suspected Cancer Referrals

If the receiving trust believes an Urgent Suspected Cancer Referral is suboptimal/inappropriate this needs to be communicated directly with the referring primary care team with the reasons for rejection/downgrade clearly described. The trust should provide advice along with relevant guidance and offer alternative referral routes as appropriate. Only the referrer can downgrade or withdraw a referral.

3. Common Referrals

3.1. Lymphadenopathy

Lymphadenopathy is a very common reason for referral for urgent suspected cancer. To supplement the CCLG guidance, the Alder Hey Children's Hospital Lymphadenopathy Referral Guidelines is included in Appendix 3. Again, where there is uncertainty regarding indication for referral for suspected cancer or urgency of referral a telephone discussion with the local general paediatrician on call is highly recommended.

3.2. Breast Lumps and Breast Symptoms

Urgent suspected cancer referrals for CYP with breast lumps and breast symptoms are not uncommon however there has never been a case of breast malignancy reported in a child under the age of 15 years in the UK. It is important however to consider that other malignancies can affect the soft tissue and bony structures of the chest wall. The Association of Breast Surgery have produced comprehensive guidance on the management of children with breast symptoms, ABS: Guidance and Pathways for the Assessment of Children with Breast Symptoms, this can be found within the Breast Surgery section on the guidance platform page (Guidance & Pathways for the Assessment of Children with Breast Surgery). Review of this is highly recommended prior to urgent suspected cancer referral for breast symptoms in CYP, including breast lumps. Where there is clinical uncertainty regarding indication for referral for suspected cancer or urgency of referral a telephone discussion with the local paediatrician on call is highly recommended.

3.3. Skin

The dermatology service is referred a high number of concerning lesions from primary care. Whilst skin malignancies are possible in children, they're extremely unusual (incidence around 1 per million in 1-4 year olds, rising to 10 per million children in 15-19 year olds). Children normally develop new melanocytic naevi, and these will change for a number of years before reaching a stable size, and so the usual criteria for assessment (such as the 7 point checklist) is often inaccurately skewed in the direction of concern. Whilst teledermatology isn't possible without dermatoscopic images, many GPs are now able to take dermatoscopic images and can use these for advice and guidance. This pathway may allow for reassurance that review either isn't required, or can be triaged as urgent or routine, rather than on the suspected cancer pathway. Likewise, if dermatoscopic images aren't available, GPs are asked to avoid the suspected cancer pathway unless very high suspicion and perhaps employ regular monitoring until the children are seen in clinic. Referrals can be upgraded at any point if concerning change is noted.

4. Appendices

4.1. Appendix 1: Table of findings that may be associated with a cancer diagnosis in childhood

Table of findings that may be associated with a cancer diagnosis in childhood.

Symptoms and signs which support decision making around referral have been suggested in the table below.

- **GREEN:** Reassuring features consider watchful wait.
- AMBER: Concerning features consider referral or discussion with paediatrician.
- **RED:** High-risk features requires referral:
 - Urgent referral
 - Very urgent referral (48 hours)
 - Immediate referral (telephone referral within a few hours)

Urgent Suspected Cancer Referrals for Children and Young People

Cheshire and Merseyside

Cancer Alliance

	CONSIDER WATCHFUL WAIT	CONSIDER REFERRAL	REQUIRES REFERRAL		
Ear, Nose and Throat			Swallowing difficulties (in absence of local	cause)	Very urgent referral (48 hrs)
		Obstruction of ear/nose	• Abnormal mass within the nasopharyngeal	space	Immediate referral
Endocrine		 Polyuria/polydipsia Delayed/arrested puberty Abnormal growth 	Precocious pubertyGalactorrhoea	Urgent referral	
Gastrointestinal		 Constipation not responsive to simple laxatives in appropriate dosage 	• Persistent vomiting on awakening		Needs referral: urgency depends on length of history and associated symptoms/signs
		Abdominal distension	cases immediate n		eferral, and in many eferral if symptoms rtension, reduced urine ase in size
			Unexplained hepatomegaly		Immediate referral
Haematology		 Localised petechiae/ brusing (unexplained) 	 Splenomegaly - either in isolation or in ass night sweats, weight loss, pruritus or fever 	ociation with	Very urgent referral
		 Bleeding (unexplained) Pallor Fatigue (persistent) Infection (recurrent, persistent or unexplained) Generalised lymphadenopathy Generalised bone pain (All should be offered a very urgent FBC and referral to paediatrics considered. Some children with these symptoms will need immediate referral) 	Widespread petechiae/bruising		Immediate referral

Urgent Suspected Cancer Referrals for Children and Young People

Cheshire and Merseyside

Cancer Alliance

			CONSIDER REFERRAL				
Lymphadenopathy	cause	fectious (offer very urgent FBC) uuse • Abnormal consistency		 Persistent enlarged nodes >2cms for >6 weeks with no decrease in size Supraclavicular site 			Urgent referral
	 <2cm Resported to antice 	loss of prufitus				Very urgent referral (48hrs)	
				Symptoms/signs of media:Associated bone pain	stinal mass		Immediate referral
Musculoskeletal	•	Pain at re Unexplai	n ing activities est ined or persistent sed bone pain (offer	 Unexplained enlarging ma Soft tissue mass with local Localised unexplained bor x-ray alongside referral) Ultrasound scan of a mass or is uncertain and clinical X-ray suggests the possibility 	lymphadenop ne pain (consid suggests soft concern persis	er very urgent tissue sarcoma	Urgent referral
				Limp with feverPainful scoliosis			Immediate referral
Neurology			e with vomiting	• Afebrile seizures			Urgent referral
		Reducing school performance		 Increasing head circumfere Headache worse in the mo Persistent headache in a c 	orning or wakin		Very urgent referral (48hrs)
				 Abnormal gait Abnormal coordination Confusion or disorientation occurring with headache New bladder or bowel dysfunction Development regression Focal motor or sensory abnormalities Abnormal head position, such as wry neck, head tilt, or stiff neck 			Immediate referral
Ophthalmology				• Absent red reflex			Urgent referral, but in infants very urgent referral (48hrs) appropriate
				 Proptosis Abnormal eye movements Blurred/double vision Papilloedema 	5		Very urgent referral (48hrs) to ophthalmology and/ or paediatrics
				• New onset paralytic (non-o	concomitant) so	quint	Immediate referral
Renal				 Persistent unexplained mid Hypertension (>95th centi 13 and over, >130/80). Se immediate referral – see b 	le, or for childr vere hypertens	en aged	Urgent referral
				 Frank haematuria Severe hypertension (>951 +12mmHg or >140/90 – wh lower) 		immediate refe with abdomina	erral, but consider rral if in association mass, hypertension, function or other s
Respiratory		stridor in	nged wheeze/ absence of typical history na/viral induced wheeze	 New wheeze/stridor with a Difficulty breathing with fa Mediastinal widening on a 	cial swelling	h	Immediate referral
Miscellaneous		Strong far Repeated Severe or Unexplain Abnormal Blood-sta Persistent	ancer predisposition syndromes mily history of malignancy presentation to health profession persistent cradle cap ted weight loss growth ined vaginal discharge parental/patient concern or and toms are most likely to have a b	onals xiety about symptoms, even if	• Testicular r	nass	Very urgent referral (48hrs)

4.2. Appendix 2: Example of Urgent Suspected Cancer Form for Suspected Children's Cancer

https://www.nwchildrenscancerodn.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/USCR-14.03.25-Clean.docx

									hire an eyside	
								Cance	r Alliar	ce
	URGENT SUSP <u>SUSPEC</u>			ANCER REI <u>.DREN'S C/</u>			RM			
Please refer to C	MCA Urgent Suspec	cted	Cance	er Pathways	for Chi	Idren	and	Young	People(link)
If there is a high s consultant oncold All other referrals Cancer Form - Se	e referrals may be: Imr suspicion of cancer ogist on call at Alder should be made int uspected Children's	(Imn Hey to lo Car	nediat / Child cal sei ncers i	e/Very urger Iren's Hospit rvices using via e-RS (2V	nt refer al via s the CN WW Ch	ral) pi switch ICA U <i>ildren</i>	lease iboar Jrger and	e conta rd. 015 nt Susp <i>Young</i>	ct the 1 228 4 ected People)
on call oncologist, • <u>NICE NG1</u> • <u>cclq-referra</u>	rgency of referral, con AHCH. Written guidar 2 Referral guidance for al-guidance-april-2021 spected Cancer Pathy	nce o or su L.pdf	can be ispecte	found: ed childhood (ancers					int or
	PATIENT ENGAGE	EME	NT – T	HIS IS A MA	NDATO	RY F	IELD)		
suspected cancer s	arent or guardian beer service and the reason ace/ patient support	n for	referra	al?	-		Da	Yes	No	
about this referral?					nformat	ion		Yes	No	
Is the patient available of the patient availa	able within the next 48	3 nrs	/14 da	iys? ^				Yes	No	
	all contact details are	con	rect an	d informed th	at the i	nitial		Г		
appointment may b								Yes	No	
		REF	ERRE	R DETAILS						
Referring GP	Free Text Prompt			GP Co		Na			anisation ce Code	
Usual GP	Usual GP Title Usua				GP Sur	name				
GP Address	Usual GP Full Addre			ine)						
GP Tel. No.	Usual GP Phone Nu									
GP secure email	Organisation E-mail	Add	ress							
Date seen by GP	Long date letter mer	han	De	cision to refer	date		na dr	ate lette	r merge	1
Date occir by OP	cong date letter mer			DETAILS	uate		ng ua	ale lette	merget	
Title & Surname	Title Surname			Forename(s	5)	Give	n Nai	me		
Date of Birth	Date of Birth	Ag	е	Age	Gend			nder(ful)	
NHS Number			-				-			
Address	Home Full Address (sing	le line))			-			
Home Tel No.	Patient Home Telephone		Work	Tel No.	Patier	nt Wor	k Tel	ephone	•	
Mobile Tel No.	Patient Mobile Telephone		Pa	tient email	Patier	nt E-m	ail Ao	ddress		
Parent /	Name			Single Code	e Entry:	Patie	nt's r	next of k	in	
Guardian	Contact Telephone Relationship			Free Text F Free Text F						
	RE	FER	RALI	NFORMATIO	N					

NHS Number Given Name Surname Urgent Suspected Children's Cancer Referral form CMCAv1.3.1

Cheshire and	
Merseyside	

		Cancer Alliance
Main reason for referral (please explain whether the second secon	ny you t	hink this child may have cancer)
Free Text Prompt		
Please refer to Urgent Suspected Ca	ncer P	athways for Children and Young People link
Please Indicate with X type of Cancer suspe	eted	Please add additional information of symptoms
Flease indicate with X type of Cancer suspe	cleu	and/or signs
Abdominal Tumour		
Palpable abdominal mass or		
abdominal distension - Very urgent	1 · · ·	
Leukaemia-		
Pallor, fatigue, bruising, petechiae,		
hepatosplenomegaly - Immediate		
Lymphoma		
Enlarged lymph nodes fitting the		
criteria for referral - Urgent		
Bone Tumour		
Chronic pain, palpable mass - Urgent		
Soft Tissue Sarcoma		
Soft tissue mass lesion - Urgent		
Retinoblastoma		
Absent red reflex - Urgent		
Brain or spinal tumour		
Symptoms of raised intracranial		
pressure, new squint - Immediate		
Skin Cancer		
Meeting criteria for urgent suspected		
cancer referral - Urgent		
Breast		
Meeting criteria for urgent suspected		
cancer referral - Urgent		
Thyroid		
Meeting criteria for urgent suspected		
cancer referral -Urgent		
Not sure / Other (please state)		
(p		
		NFORMATION :
Other Symptoms	Detai	l of symptoms/Length of time
Other Exam findings		
Other Exam findings		
Any Additional Information		
		NS Bloods CXR
Please attach if no n Investigations	nerged	information is pulled through
nivesugations		

NHS Number Given Name Surname Urgent Suspected Children's Cancer Referral form CMCAv1.3.1

Cancer Alliance

Cheshire and Merseyside

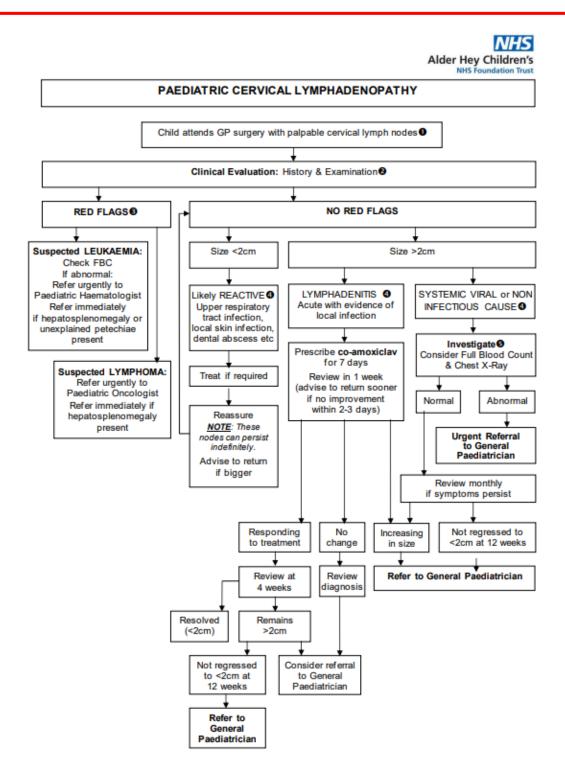
	Cancer Alliance
CULTURAL, MOBILITY STATUS A	ND ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENTS
Does the patient have any Communication, Mobility or Safeguarding needs	Yes No
Please detail if there are any reasonable adjustments needed or additional requirements	Free Text Prompt
If the patient requires Translation or Interpretation Services Please give details:	
What is the patient's preferred first language?	Main Language
Ethnicity	Ethnic Origin
Religion (if recorded)	Religion
Temporary resident	Yes No
Overseas visitor	Yes No
CLINICAL INFOR	MATION/HISTORY
Consultations	
Problems	
Values and Investigations	
Medication	
Allergies	

NHS Number Given Name Surname Urgent Suspected Children's Cancer Referral form CMCAv1.3.1

Appendix 3: Paediatric cervical lymphadenopathy pathway

This pathway is included for guidance only and is not an agreed cheshire and merseyside guideline.

Referrals should be made into local general paediatrics and choice of antibiotic should be directed by local policy.



Lymphadenopathy Pathway: Version 3, April 2021, Page 1 of 4

OCervical lymphadenopathy

Cervical lymphadenopathy is a common presentation in primary care. The aetiology is extremely broad and includes malignant, autoimmune, inflammatory and infective causes. It is important to remember that **palpable lymph nodes** are very common in young children and **usually entirely benign**.

How common are palpable cervical lymph nodes?

Age	% with palpable lymph nodes
<1 month	17
1-6 months	27-38
7-12 months	44-55
13-24 months	48
2 years	68
3 years	59
4 years	65
5 years	74

Reference: Herzog LW Clin Pediatr (Phila) 1983 July 22(7): 485-7

Causes:

Viral	adenovirus	parvovirus	RSV	rhinovirus	EBV
Bacterial	Staph aureus	Group A Strep			
LESS COMMO	N				
Bacterial	Bartonella	atypical mycobacterium	mycobacterium tuberculosis		
Neoplastic	lymphoma				
Other	Connective tissue disorders (SLE, RA)	Kawasaki disease			
RARE					
Viral	CMV	HIV	rubella	mumps	varicella
Neoplastic	leukaemia				
Other infective	toxoplasmosis	fungal	anaerobic bacteria		
Drugs	Vaccines	phenytoin	isoniazid		

Lymphadenopathy Pathway: Version 3, April 2021, Page 2 of 4

OClinical Evaluation

The assessment of children with lymphadenopathy requires a thorough history and careful examination in order to elicit abnormal findings, guide the physician towards the most appropriate differential diagnoses and hence the most appropriate investigations, treatment and referral.

History

Node characteristics:

- How long has the node been enlarged for?
- Is the size changing over time?
- Has the node recently got bigger or smaller?
- Has the overlying skin become red or violaceous?
- Has the node been painful?

Child's health:

- Is the child systemically unwell (e.g. fever, night sweats, weight loss)?
- Have there been any rashes or skin lesions in the drainage area of the node?
- Has there been a recent ear, nose or throat infection?
- What is the status of the teeth?
- Have there been many previous infections suggestive of immune deficiency?
- Has the child had recent immunisations?
- Is the child taking medications?

Risk factors for infective causes:

- Has there been any exposure to TB or other infection?
- Has there been exposure to kittens or raw/undercooked meat?
- Has the family travelled anywhere significant?

Examination

- Size: Measure with ruler / tape
- · Site: Which nodes are affected? What area do they drain?
- Mobility
- Fixation to under or overlying structures
- Tenderness
- Redness and warmth
- Matting



In the second second

RED FLAGS FOR LYMPHOMA

Refer urgently to Paediatric Oncologist if any of the following:

Supraclavicular nodes involved Other features of general ill health, fever,

night sweats, shortness of breath, pruritus or weight loss (lasting more than a week, with no focus of infection)

Lymph nodes are progressively enlarging Axillary nodes involved (in absence of local dermatitis or infection)

Hepatosplenomegaly (immediate referral)

RED FLAGS FOR LEUKAEMIA If any of the following – Check FBC. Refer urgently to Paediatric Haematologist If FBC is abnormal Pallor Persistent fatigue Unexplained fever Unexplained persistent infection Generalised lymphadenopathy Persistent or unexplained bone pain Unexplained bruising Unexplained bleeding Hepatosplenomegaly (immediate referral) Unexplained petechiae (immediate referral)

Lymphadenopathy Pathway: Version 3, April 2021, Page 3 of 4

OThe three most common causes of lymphadenopathy are REACTIVE (to identified local infection) LYMPADENITIS (acute with evidence of local infection) and SYSTEMIC / NON-INFECTIVE.

The common features of each group are summarised below:

REACTIVE (bacterial or viral)	LYMPHADENITIS	SYSTEMIC VIRAL & NON-INFECTIVE CAUSES
Duration usually less than 6 weeks	Localised lymph node tenderness	Duration depends on cause
URTI symptoms present	Warmth and/or erythema	Sore throat, fever
Dental infection/pain	Fever	Hepatosplenomegaly (EBV)
Local skin infection /		
inflammation (eg eczema)		
Lymph nodes may be tender		May have rash (rubella, measles)
Lymph nodes mobile and soft		Arthralgia, headaches
No red flags		Lymph nodes may be tender
No supraclavicular lymph nodes		No supraclavicular lymph nodes
No organomegaly		Lymph nodes mobile and soft

Non-Infectious causes (any age)

Neuroblastoma	Leukaemia
Lymphoma	Rhabdomyosarcoma
Metastatic disease	Kawasaki disease
Sustamia Lunus Endhamatasus (SLE)	Iuwanila rhaumatoid arthritic (DA)

OInvestigation in Primary Care

Most cases of cervical lymphadenopathy are reactive and do not require investigation. Tender lymph nodes are usually due to acute infection, especially if accompanied by erythema, warmth or induration.

Any red flags for leukaemia should be investigated with a FBC and urgent referral if the result is abnormal.

If any red flags for lymphoma are found, an urgent referral should be made. Consider FBC and chest X-ray if systemic viral or non-infective cause. A child with an abnormal CXR should be referred urgently.

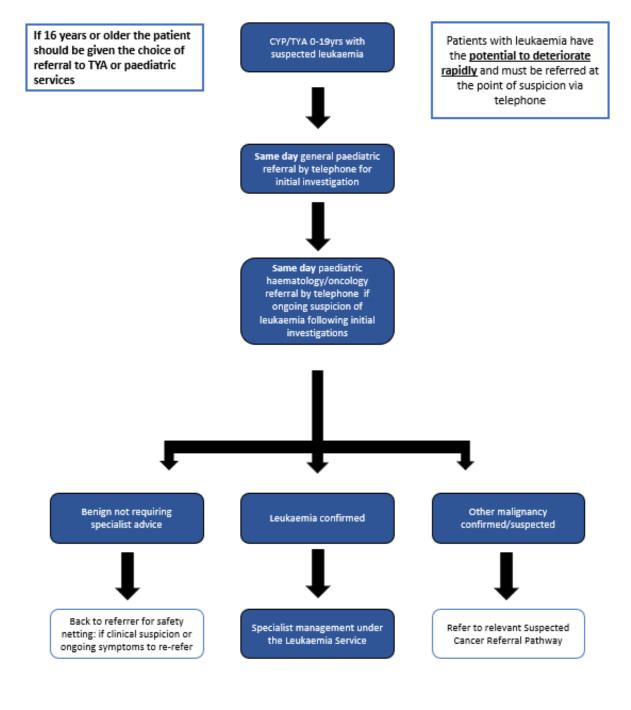
If you suspect a differential diagnosis other than lymphadenopathy (such as a branchial cleft cyst etc) then ultrasound may be useful at this stage.

Author: Francine Verhoeff Approved by: Medicine Divisional Governance Group on 23/04/2021 Review date: April 2024

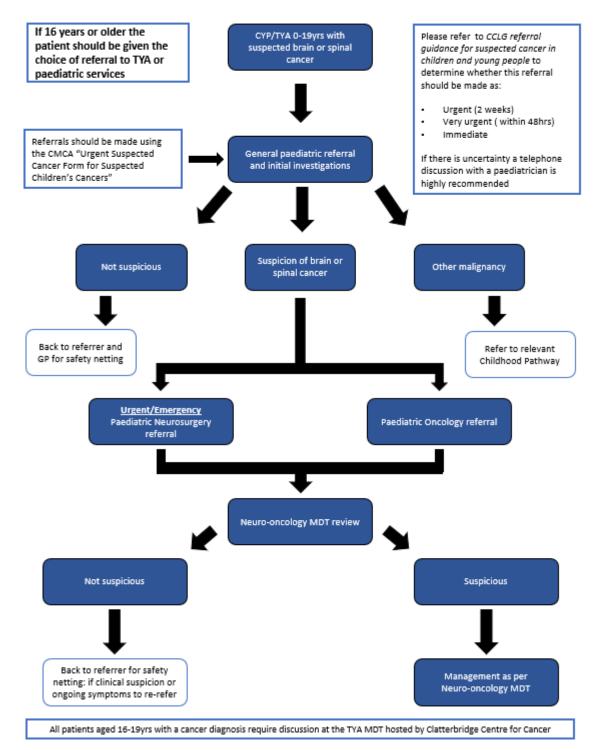
Lymphadenopathy Pathway: Version 3, April 2021, Page 4 of 4



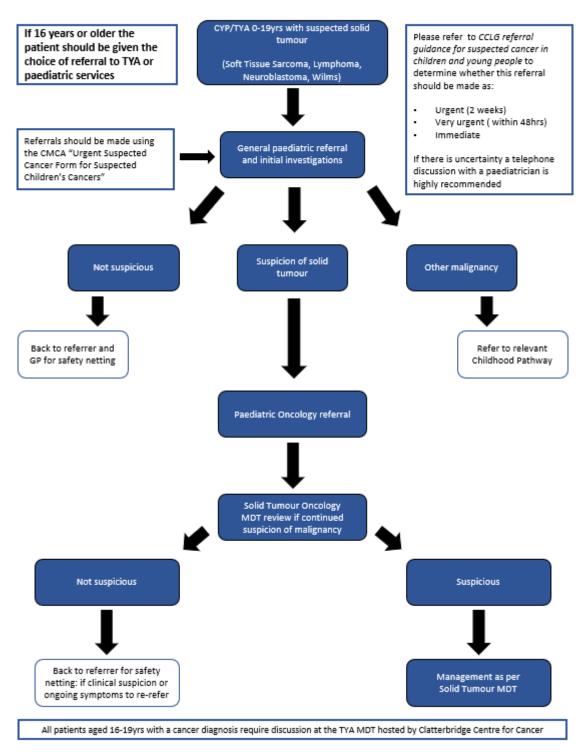
Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for suspected leukaemia 0-19 yrs



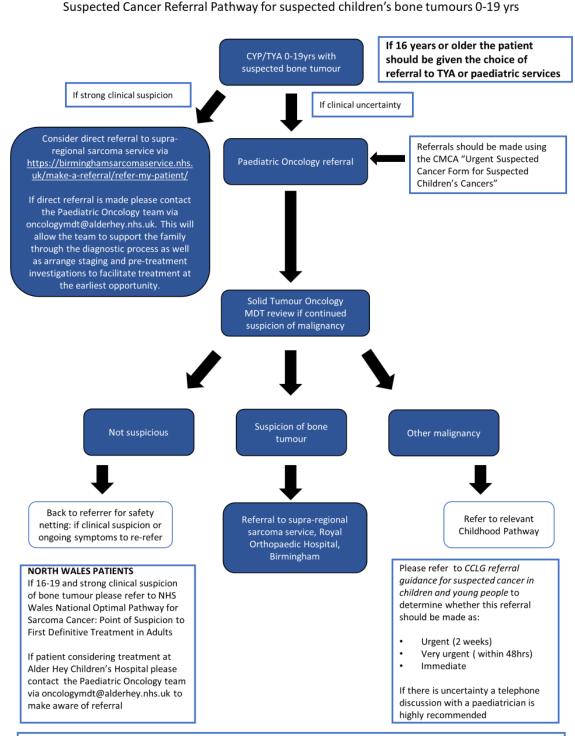
All patients aged 16-19yrs with a cancer diagnosis require discussion at the TYA MDT hosted by Clatterbridge Centre for Cancer



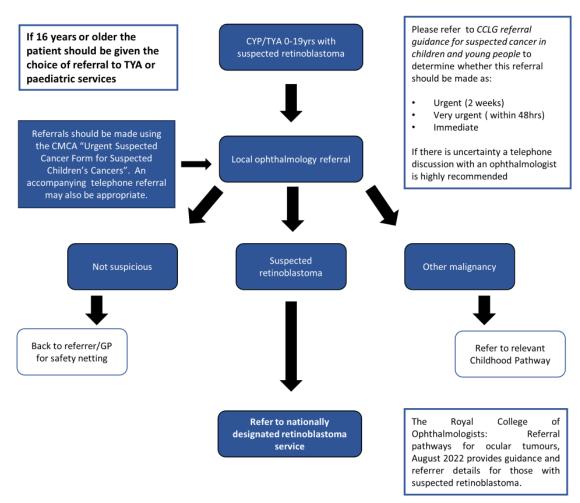
Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for suspected children's brain or spinal cancer 0-19 yrs



Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for suspected children's solid tumours 0-19 yrs

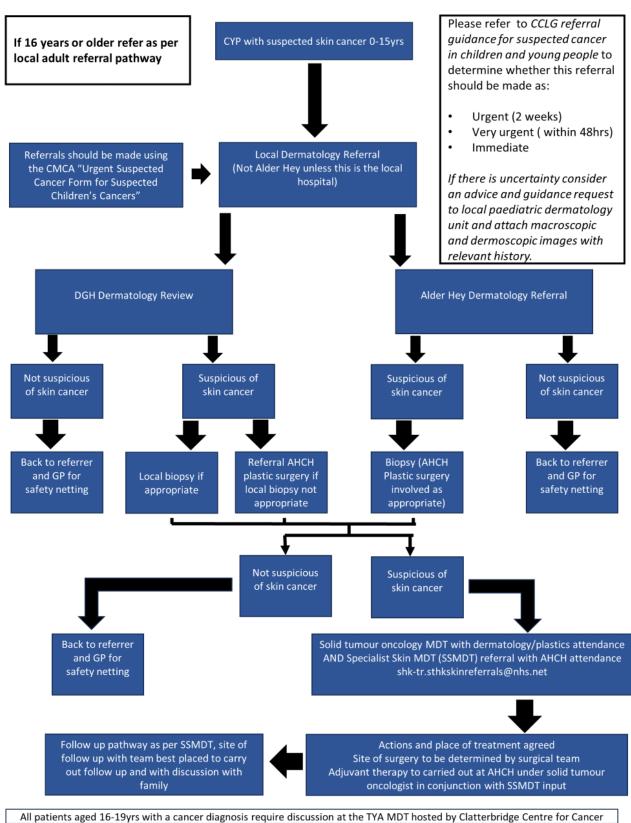


All patients aged 16-19yrs with a cancer diagnosis require discussion at the TYA MDT hosted by Clatterbridge Centre for Cancer

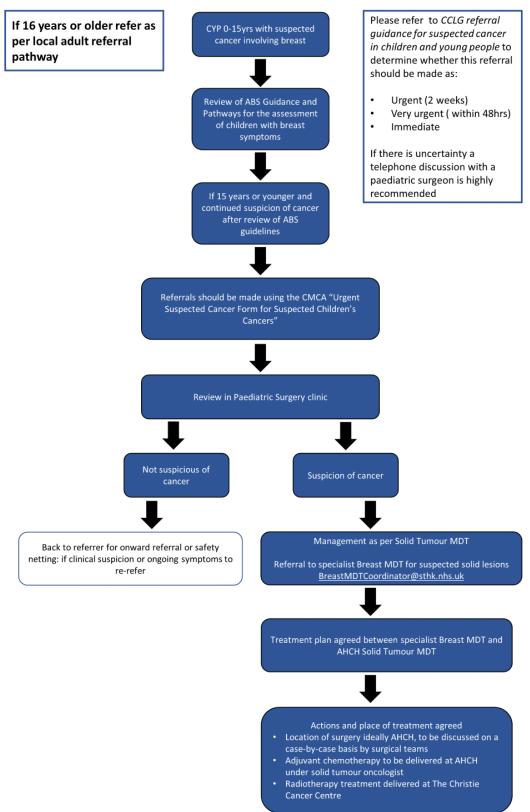


Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for suspected retinoblastoma 0-19 yrs

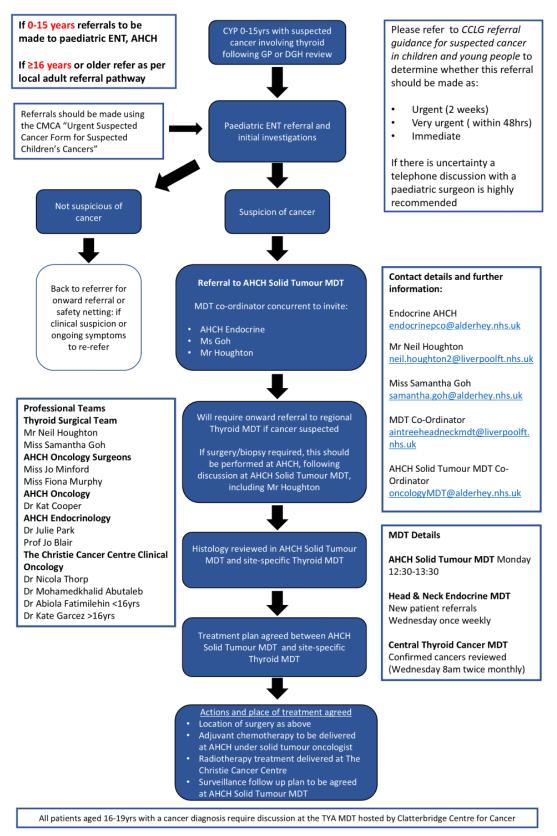
All patients aged 16-19yrs with a cancer diagnosis require discussion at the TYA MDT hosted by Clatterbridge Centre for Cancer



Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for suspected skin cancer 0-15 yrs



Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for breast symptoms and breast lumps in girls and boys 0-15 yrs



Suspected Cancer Referral Pathway for thyroid tumours 0-19yrs