

# Clinical Trials

Clinical trials formally test whether a drug is safe and effective. Some patients enroll to gain access to cancer treatments that are not otherwise available. Each trial has specific eligibility requirements. Two categories of clinical trials are:

**Adjuvant Trials** For patients who do not have evidence of cancer but are at risk for recurrence. Two randomized MCC adjuvant trials are:

- **ADAM-** Avelumab (or placebo) after initial treatment of high-risk MCC
- **STAMP-** Pembrolizumab (or observation) after surgery

**T-cell Therapy** In cases that are non-responsive to approved immune therapies, a patient's own T cells are re-programmed to recognize and kill MCC cells.

- **ATTAC trial-** For virus-positive MCC, patients receive transgenic T-cells to further boost the immune system.

**More clinical trials and details at:**

- [www.merkelcell.org/treatment/clinical-trials](http://www.merkelcell.org/treatment/clinical-trials)
- [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- [www.emergingmed.com](http://www.emergingmed.com)

## Resources

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### **Merkelcell.org**

Accurate, up-to-date MCC information curated by Seattle-based clinicians and researchers who have cared for over 800 MCC patients.  
[www.merkelcell.org](http://www.merkelcell.org)

### **National Cancer Institute**

Comprehensive cancer information from the U.S. government's principal cancer research agency.  
800-422-6237  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

### **CancerCare**

Non-profit providing telephone, online and face-to-face counseling, support groups, education, and financial/co-pay assistance.  
800-813-HOPE (800-813-4673)  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

### **American Cancer Society**

Nationwide organization providing cancer research publications, patient services, and education on early detection and treatment.  
800-227-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

### **Cancer.net**

Patient information from the American Society of Clinical Oncology.  
888-651-3038  
[www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

### **The Skin Cancer Foundation**

Get an overview about MCC, plus information about diagnosis, treatment, and risks.  
[www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org)

### **Medicine Assistance Tool**

Dedicated search engine with financial assistance resources for medications.  
[www.medicineassistancetool.org](http://www.medicineassistancetool.org)

# About Merkel Cell Carcinoma

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## Informational Pamphlet Nghiem Lab



*Example of Merkel cell carcinoma on the hand*

**September 2020**

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Left to right: Merkel cell carcinoma of the cheek and eyelid

## Disease Background

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*Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is a rare, aggressive type of skin cancer. MCC arises from uncontrolled growth of cells that share characteristics with normal Merkel cells of the skin.*

The disease usually appears as a painless bump, often on sun-exposed areas such as the face, neck, or arms. The tumor may be flesh-colored, purple, or red.

### Risk Factors

Although exact causes are not known, associated factors include: age >65, fair skin, extensive sun exposure, chronic immune suppression, and the Merkel cell polyomavirus in 80% of cases.

## Diagnosis

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**Skin biopsy.** A small sample of affected skin is removed and examined by a pathologist to determine if it contains cancerous cells.

Other tests may be conducted to determine whether MCC has spread beyond the skin:

**Imaging.** A PET/CT scan is recommended at time of diagnosis for most patients.

**Sentinel lymph node biopsy.** A radioactive dye is injected near the tumor. The first lymph nodes to receive the dye (sentinel nodes) are removed and examined under a microscope for presence of cancer.

## Treatment

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Treatment options often depend on whether the MCC has spread beyond the skin. Approaches vary between patients and commonly include a combination of:

- **Surgery**
- **Radiation** – reduces risk of recurrence at primary site and/or nearby lymph nodes
- **Immunotherapy** – medications boost the immune system to fight MCC
- **Chemotherapy** – can control advanced MCC if immunotherapy is not an option

## Surveillance

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Several methods can detect recurrences.

- **Merkel polyomavirus serology test** – blood test that tracks Merkel virus antibodies to detect recurrences early
- **Imaging** – PET and CT scans
- **Physical exam** – clinician-conducted exams of abnormal lesions and nodes

## Exciting MCC Developments

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### Personalized Risk Calculator

An online tool to assess an individual patient's risk of MCC recurrence at any given time after diagnosis. Available at [merkelcell.org/recur](http://merkelcell.org/recur).

### “Therapeutic” Vaccine

After initial surgery/radiation, we currently have no treatments to minimize the chance of MCC recurrence. A therapeutic vaccine targeting the Merkel virus could help the immune system recognize and destroy any remaining cancer cells in the body and is under development.

### Changes in MCC Management We Led

- PET/CT scans before initial surgery to ensure proper management
- Narrower surgical margins to minimize recovery time and delays in radiation
- Single-dose radiation to decrease side effects and inconvenience

### DNA Damage Response Inhibitor

MCC is highly sensitive to DNA-damaging therapies such as radiation and chemotherapy, yet these therapies rarely stimulate an immune response on their own. Recent studies suggest that new drugs which inhibit the cancer's ability to respond normally to DNA damage could help the immune system control MCC. We received an ASPIRE grant from the Mark Foundation to explore this concept.

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