

Plain English Summary

Biologics as add-on therapy for severe asthma

What does the guidance say?

Benralizumab is recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government subsidy for patients with severe eosinophilic asthma who meet certain clinical criteria.

Omalizumab biosimilar (Omlyclo) is recommended for inclusion on the Standard Drug List (SDL) for government subsidy for patients with severe allergic asthma.

Dupilumab, mepolizumab, omalizumab reference biologic (Xolair) and tezepelumab are not recommended for subsidy for patients with severe asthma.

What is severe asthma?

Asthma is a long-term (chronic) condition that causes swelling (inflammation) in the airways of the lungs making it harder to breathe. This can lead to asthma attacks with symptoms such as wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and coughing.

Some people experience frequent or life-threatening asthma attacks and persistent symptoms despite taking high doses of daily asthma medications. This is called severe asthma and can affect daily activities and may require additional (add-on) medication to help control symptoms and reduce asthma attacks.

There are different types of severe asthma. People with eosinophilic asthma have high levels of eosinophils (a type of white blood cell) in their blood and lungs, causing airway inflammation and asthma symptoms. People with allergic asthma have airways that are extra sensitive to certain allergens such as dust mites, mould, or pollen. When exposed to allergens, the body's immune system makes proteins called IgE (immunoglobulin E) antibodies, which may trigger an asthma attack.

What are benralizumab and Omlyclo?

Omlyclo is a biosimilar of a biologic drug called omalizumab (Xolair). Benralizumab and omalizumab belong to a group of medicines called monoclonal antibodies. Benralizumab targets and reduces eosinophils in the blood and lungs, while omalizumab blocks the action of IgE antibodies. Both drugs are given as an injection under the skin (subcutaneously) to help reduce airway inflammation and the number of asthma attacks.

If benralizumab or Omlyclo is a suitable treatment for you, your doctor will tell you how much you need and how long you need to have it for.

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What is a biosimilar?

Biologics are medicines that contain active ingredients extracted from living organisms. Biosimilars are also biologics. They are highly similar, but not identical to, their reference biologics (i.e. the first biologic developed). Biosimilars have similar effectiveness, safety and quality compared to their reference biologics and are used to treat the same diseases.

Who can have benralizumab or Omlyclo?

Patients with severe eosinophilic asthma who meet certain clinical criteria can have benralizumab, while patients with severe allergic asthma can have Omlyclo. Your doctor can advise if these treatments are suitable for you.

Why were they recommended for subsidy?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Benralizumab and Omlyclo were recommended for subsidy because their benefits in reducing asthma attacks for certain patients with severe eosinophilic asthma or severe allergic asthma, respectively, justify their costs.

Dupilumab, mepolizumab, omalizumab reference biologic (Xolair) and tezepelumab were not recommended for subsidy because their benefits do not justify their costs compared with benralizumab and Omlyclo. You can speak to a medical social worker to find out if there is financial assistance available to help with the cost of these treatments if you need them.

What does listing on the MAF or SDL mean for me?

Benralizumab has been listed on the MAF which helps people pay for treatments that are clinically effective and cost effective. If your doctor prescribes benralizumab for you, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

Omalizumab biosimilar (Omlyclo) has been included on the SDL. Drugs on SDL are subsidised at 50% for all Singaporean citizens who are treated in a public healthcare institution. Patients from lower to middle income households may receive up to 75% subsidy.

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