

Head and Neck Cancer Diagnosis Pathway

Background

The newly developed Head and Neck Cancer Diagnosis Pathway was designed to improve care for patients with a high suspicion of Head and Neck cancer. The intention of the pathway is to accelerate the flow of these patients through the health care system by ensuring they receive an early referral to specialty care for diagnoses, expedited and appropriate testing for highest risk patients, and increased system capacity by partnering with Oral Maxillofacial Surgery.

Objective

The Head and Neck Cancer Diagnosis Pathway was written with three main objectives:

1. Expedite referrals to expert practitioners that are skilled at diagnosing Head and Neck cancers whilst expediting appropriate testing for highest risk patients.
2. Improving patient outcomes by reducing time to diagnosis and ultimately access to treatment.
3. Improve overall patient experience and quality of life outcomes.

The pathway provides primary care providers and dental care practitioners the information that is needed to provide timely and appropriate referrals to specialist care.

Access to Specialty Care

Primary care and dental care providers in Alberta can refer patients to both Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery (all pathway related concerns) and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery (oral lesions only), for assistance with a head and neck cancer diagnosis. Patients are divided into two separate categories based on their symptoms: High Risk and Standard Risk Symptoms. Regardless of these categories, the referring practitioners are asked to send an **urgent referral to specialty care**. Only High Risk patients are required to have an urgent CT Scan ordered. Otherwise, all diagnostic care is to be selected by specialty care. **REFERRAL TO SPECIALTY CARE SHOULD NOT BE DELAYED AWAITING CT SCAN BOOKING OR CT SCAN RESULT.**

It is very important that all referrals:

1. Include a detailed symptom list
2. Include a risk assessment
3. State "As per HEAD AND NECK CANCER DIAGNOSIS PATHWAY"

PATHWAY LINK: [Provincial Head & Neck Cancer Diagnosis & Referral Pathway \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](https://albertahealthservices.ca/pathway/head-neck-cancer-diagnosis-referral/)

How to make referrals:

All care providers who receive referrals via the Head and Neck Cancer Diagnosis Pathway are required to have a profile on the Alberta Referral Directory (ARD). Please search the ARD for a provider in your area.

[Alberta Referral Directory](#) | [Alberta Health Services](#)

For Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery (all pathway related concerns)

1. Search: **Head and Neck**
2. Filter reason for referral: **Suspected Head and Neck Cancer**

For Oral Maxillofacial Surgery (oral lesions only)

1. Search: **Oral Maxillofacial**
2. Filter: **by City**
3. Refer using clinics referral form – ensure to add “**Head and Neck Cancer Diagnosis Pathway**” to referral

If you see a patient with a suspected Head and Neck Cancer, you may receive a short survey asking if you used this pathway to assist caring for the patient. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Any questions or concerns can be directed to Chandra.Sehn@albertahealthservices.ca