

Breast Implant Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA - ALCL)

What is the aim of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been designed to help answer questions that you may have and give you and your family some understanding of this condition and how it may impact on you. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

What is breast implant-associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma?

BIA-ALCL is a rare type of cancer that affects women who have had implants inserted for either cosmetic reasons or following breast reconstruction after cancer surgery. It usually involves a swelling of the breast, typically years after the operation to insert the breast implant. This swelling is due to an accumulation of fluid. BIA-ALCL has been known to occur as soon as 1 year after the operation to insert the implant and as late as 37 years after the operation. Less commonly, BIA-ALCL can take the form of a lump in the breast or a lump in the armpit. If you notice any of these problems (swelling or a lump), or have any other concerns with your implants, you should seek medical attention. Most cases of BIA-ALCL are cured by removal of the implant and the capsule surrounding the implant.

What is the risk?

Based on the currently available data, it is not possible to accurately provide an estimate of the risk for an individual women with breast implants. Within the UK we believe that there is approximately one case of BIA-ALCL for every 24,000 implants sold. Recent data from Australia puts the risk of BIA-ALCL at between 1-in-1,000 and 1-in-10,000. It is thought that the risk is highest in women with textured implants. There have been no reported cases in patients with smooth implants. In the UK 57 cases of BIA-ALCL had been reported to the MHRA up to November 2018.

The MHRA (the UK regulatory body for medical devices) continues to regard breast implants as safe and has not suggested a change in practice based on the current evidence.

Should implants be removed, just in case?

Because BIA-ALCL is rare this is not recommended for women who have no problems with their implants. If you are concerned you should discuss your options with your doctor. Generally, breast implants are not lifetime devices regardless of BIA-ALCL. The longer you have the implant, the more likely it will need to be removed. Common reasons for removal are contracture (hard or painful implants), implant rupture or movement of the implant.

How is BIA-ALCL diagnosed?

If you develop swelling in your breast around an implant you will be referred to a specialist breast surgeon who will arrange for an ultrasound scan of your breast to see if this is due to a fluid collection. If fluid is present it will be removed with a small needle by a radiologist and sent to the laboratory for analysis. Most fluid collections are not ALCL. Mammograms are not helpful for diagnosing ALCL. Other investigations such as MRI and CT-scans may need to be done if the laboratory analysis of the fluid confirms a diagnosis of ALCL or to further help establish a cause of the swelling.

Should women with implants be screened for ALCL?

Regular screening is not recommended for BIA-ALCL. If you notice enlargement or swelling of one or both breasts, or a lump, you should seek medical advice as soon as possible.

What is the prognosis and treatment of breast implant-associated ALCL?

Most cases are cured by removal of the implant and capsule surrounding the implant. Usually your doctor will remove both implants, even if BIA- ALCL has only occurred in one breast. Sometimes there is a solid lump (not just fluid). In these cases, chemotherapy or radiotherapy may be required. The management of BIA-ALCL is multidisciplinary with all patients requiring a referral to a surgeon experienced with breast implants and the involvement of a haematologist who specialises in lymphoma, for initial and ongoing investigations and management.

What else is being done to monitor this?

In the UK the Breast and Cosmetic Implant Registry has been set up to record the details of all individuals who have breast implant surgery for any reason. This requires your consent and your surgeon will discuss this with you. All UK cases of BIA-ALCL have been reported to the MHRA since 2011.

Who should I contact if I have further questions?

If you are considering or about to have implant based surgery then please discuss this with your surgeon or their team. If you have already had surgery then in the first instance you should contact the team that inserted the breast implant. At this stage it would be helpful to ensure that you have details about the implant that was inserted. This may have been given to you at the time of surgery on a card the size of a bank card or should be contained within your medical records that your surgeon/hospital will keep. If you are not able to do this then your GP will arrange for you to be seen in our breast clinic where we can answer any questions you have regarding this.