

# Diagnosis in a month to end agony of suspected cancer cases

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SUSPECTED cancer sufferers will be given a definitive diagnosis or the all-clear within a month, to end the "nerve-wracking uncertainty" of longer waits, the Government has announced.

Health officials say the measure will save up to 11,000 lives a year, and will come alongside a new pledge to give all cancer survivors a "tailored recovery package" including access to psychological therapy.

The pledges are part of a wider strategy to improve diagnosis and treatment, which aims to save 30,000 lives a year. Each year 280,000 people are diagnosed with cancer in England.

Currently there are no specific NHS limits on how long patients have to wait to find out if they have cancer. There is a target for treatment to start within two months of GP referral in 85 per cent of cases, but this target has been missed for more than a year.

Health officials said the plans would be backed by an investment of £300 million a year in diagnostics, with 200 more staff trained to carry out tests. Five hospitals will test out the new target before the programme is rolled out nationally to cover all cancers by 2020.

Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, said: "For people who are worried they may have cancer, waiting for that all-important test result is a nerve-wracking time. We have a duty to make sure this period of uncertainty is as short as possible.

"For those who get the all-

clear, they will have peace of mind sooner," he said. "Those who have cancer will get treatment much quicker and we will save thousands of lives as a result."

The plans will also mean those who fear they have cancer will be able to refer themselves for tests.

The commitments are part of a response to a report published by an independent cancer taskforce, which also called for investment in equipment to treat cancer and efforts to improve big variations in care around the country. Ministers will respond to the rest of the proposals later in the year.

Mr Hunt made a series of commitments, including more personalised cancer treatment and better support for survivors of cancer.

Around 25,000 extra people a year will have their cancers genetically tested to identify the most effective treatments, reducing unnecessary chemotherapy.

One in two people in the UK will be diagnosed with cancer at some point, rising to two in three of those born today, forecasts suggest. Much of the rise is explained by increasing life expectancy, with the risk of cancer rising with age.

But around one third of the increase is fuelled by lifestyle factors such as alcohol, smoking, rising obesity and changes in child-bearing patterns.

Harpal Kumar, head of Cancer Research UK, who chaired the taskforce, said: "Services for diagnosing cancer are under immense pressure, which is why increased investment and extra staff are so important."

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