



ESTRO ACROP guideline

ESTRO ACROP guidelines for target volume definition in the treatment of locally advanced non-small cell lung cancer



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ABSTRACT

Radiotherapy (RT) plays a major role in the curative treatment of locally advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). Therefore, the ACROP committee was asked by the ESTRO to provide recommendations on target volume delineation for standard clinical scenarios in definitive (chemo)radiotherapy (RT) and adjuvant RT for locally advanced NSCLC. The guidelines given here are a result of the evaluation of a structured questionnaire followed by a consensus discussion, voting and writing procedure within the committee. Hence, we provide advice for methods and time-points of diagnostics and imaging before the start of treatment planning and for the mandatory and optional imaging to be used for planning itself. Concerning target volumes, recommendations are given for GTV delineation of primary tumour and lymph nodes followed by issues related to the delineation of CTVs for definitive and adjuvant radiotherapy. In the context of PTV delineation, recommendations about the management of geometric uncertainties and target motion are given. We further provide our opinions on normal tissue delineation and organisational and responsibility questions in the process of target volume delineation. This guideline intends to contribute to the standardisation and optimisation of the process of RT treatment planning for clinical practice and prospective studies.

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Radiotherapy (RT) plays a major role in the curative treatment of locally advanced disease, which represent approximately one third of patients diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) [1,2]. It therefore accounts for a high workload in most RT departments worldwide and is predicted to further increase in the years to come [3,4]. The ACROP committee provides recommendations for target volume (TV) delineation for standard clinical scenarios in definitive (chemo)RT and adjuvant RT for locally advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC).

Methodology

All recommendations in this manuscript are the result of the evaluation of a structured questionnaire followed by a consensus discussion and voting procedure within the committee. This resulted in a categorisation of recommendations in four categories: Mandatory (M), Recommended (R), Optional (O) or Discouraged (D). This procedure was followed by a writing process including referencing of relevant published literature, a final discussion and review by committee members.

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Recommendations

Diagnostics/imaging

In preparation of TV delineation for curative-intent RT or chemo-RT in patients with NSCLC, a diagnostic CT scan with intravenous (IV) iodine contrast (unless contra-indicated) and a diagnostic whole body FDG-PET-CT are considered mandatory (M). The FDG-PET-CT scan should be performed within 3 weeks before start of treatment [5] (R) since PET-CT information may otherwise be outdated with increasing time to treatment [6–8]. In case of sequential chemotherapy followed by definitive RT, it is mandatory to perform FDG-PET-CT scan before induction chemotherapy and repeat a chest CT with IV iodine contrast (unless contra-indicated) after chemotherapy prior to the start of RT (M).

For the diagnosis of nodal involvement, beyond imaging, additional tests should be considered. In case of radiologically enlarged lymph nodes (short axis ≥ 1 cm on the CT scan) [9] or lymph nodes with increased focal FDG uptake on FDG-PET-CT, biopsy (histology, cytology) is recommended, if it has impact on TV definition (R). The appropriate method for biopsy of mediastinal lymph nodes is based on their location and options include endobronchial ultrasound (EBUS), oesophageal ultrasound (EUS) or mediastinoscopy; in case of supraclavicular nodes ultrasound-guided biopsy may be used (O).

A diagnostic MRI scan of the chest or sub-regions of interest is optional and should be considered in cases with chest wall infiltration, superior sulcus tumours [10] or para-spinal tumours [11] (O).

Planning-CT scan

At the time of planning, a CT scan in treatment position is mandatory (M) and should include IV iodine contrast (unless contra-indicated) to help delineation of the primary tumour and lymph node TV and the OARs (R). Planning CT scans should have a matrix of typically 512×512 voxels on the axial plane, a slice thickness of 2–3 mm and a longitudinal scan range covering at least from the cricoid to the mid abdomen to ensure the inclusion of the full thoracic cavity (M).

An assessment of respiratory motion on a respiratory-correlated 4D-CT scan is recommended (R). The reconstructed 8 to 10 equally distributed temporal phases of the 4D-CT are used for motion quantification purposes. To facilitate RT treatment planning, several image reconstruction techniques can be used (O) to generate a 3D data set to be used for dose calculation that incorporates the patient's specific tumour motion such as the Maximum Intensity Projection (MIP) which is applicable to more peripherally located primary tumours and displays the highest density value pixels throughout the respiratory cycle, the Mid-Ventilation (MidV) scan which corresponds to the CT scan phase closest to the time-weighted mean tumour position, or Mid-Position (MidP) technique where the tumour is represented at its exact time-weighted mean position.

An active breathing coordinator (ABC) system, e.g. with audio-visual feedback, may optionally be used to further regularize the breathing frequency and amplitude and reduce reconstruction artefacts in the 4D data set [12] (O). A 3D CT can be omitted if the Mid-Ventilation or Mid-Position CT derived from the 4D-CT is primarily used for TV and OAR delineation.

Additional imaging for RT planning

A specific planning-PET-CT scan is recommended and should be done preferably in planning position (R). A planning MRI in treatment position is optional for specific tumour indications (O). Additional imaging should only be matched with the planning-CT in the

treatment planning system, if acquired in planning position (M). Before the start of delineation, the quality of the co-registration should be checked under the responsibility of the radiation oncologist and/or physicist. To avoid incorrect contouring due to wrong co-registration, additional imaging datasets not acquired in planning position should not be co-registered in the TPS but viewed side by side for selection of pathologic structures (R).

A 4D PET-CT in treatment position is optional [13] (O). It may improve sensitivity of nodal identification and provide additional valuable information to help distinguish between tumour extent and adjacent tissues (atelectasis, diaphragm). It may therefore in selected cases help to avoid geographic misses and furthermore improve consistency in the delineation between observers [13,14].

Gross tumour volume (GTV)

GTV delineation on the planning-CT is mandatory (M). The GTV of the primary tumour and GTV of the lymph node(s) should be drawn separately, if anatomically distinguishable (R). The pre-set lung window setting ($W = 1600$ and $L = -600$) should be used to delineate tumours surrounded by lung tissue while the mediastinum pre-set window setting ($W = 400$ and $L = 20$) should be used to delineate lymph nodes and primary tumours invading the mediastinum or chest wall (R) [9]. Delineation of the GTV based on both recent CT and FDG-PET information is recommended (R). Regions of atelectasis visible on the CT image beyond the edge of the increased FDG uptake may be excluded from the GTV (O) [5].

GTV of the primary tumour post induction chemotherapy should be based on current CT imaging, however pre-chemotherapy imaging (including PET-CT) should be considered (R). GTV of the lymph nodes should include all involved lymph nodes or lymph node stations based on pre-chemotherapy clinical, pathological and imaging information, even if a node has completely disappeared in imaging (M).

Lymph nodes which are proven malignant by biopsy or considered pathological on PET (focal accumulation above blood pool) are delineated as GTV [15]. With respect to the inter-observer variation of reporting FDG-positive mediastinal nodes, in case of diagnostic uncertainty, a node should rather be included than excluded in the GTV [16,17]. Lymph nodes that are FDG-PET-positive and EBUS/EUS-negative should be included in the GTV as the false negative rates of EBUS/EUS are high (Fig. 1) [16]. PET positive nodes may only be omitted, if there is clear non-malignant biopsy explanation for the FDG positivity [16,18] or if a mediastinoscopy has been performed showing no malignant cells in the lymph node. When delineating nodal stations, the TNM Atlas 8th edition should be used as a basis for lymph node region definition (R), ideally using three-dimensionally illustrated anatomical atlases [19].

Clinical target volume (CTV)

CTV of the primary tumour should be created by expansion from the GTV by e.g. 5–8 mm [20] and should be manually edited accounting for surrounding anatomy, e.g. natural barriers such as bones or heart [21,22] (M).

CTV of the lymph nodes should be created (M) and there are two options:

Option 1 (lymph node stations): inclusion of the whole pathologically affected lymph node station (Fig. 2) including at least a 5–8 mm margin around the GTV. This option has been used in large multicentre trials without unacceptable out-field mediastinal recurrence rates [23].

Option 2 (geometric expansion): geometric expansion of nodal GTV to CTV in analogy to the primary tumour (5–8 mm). This

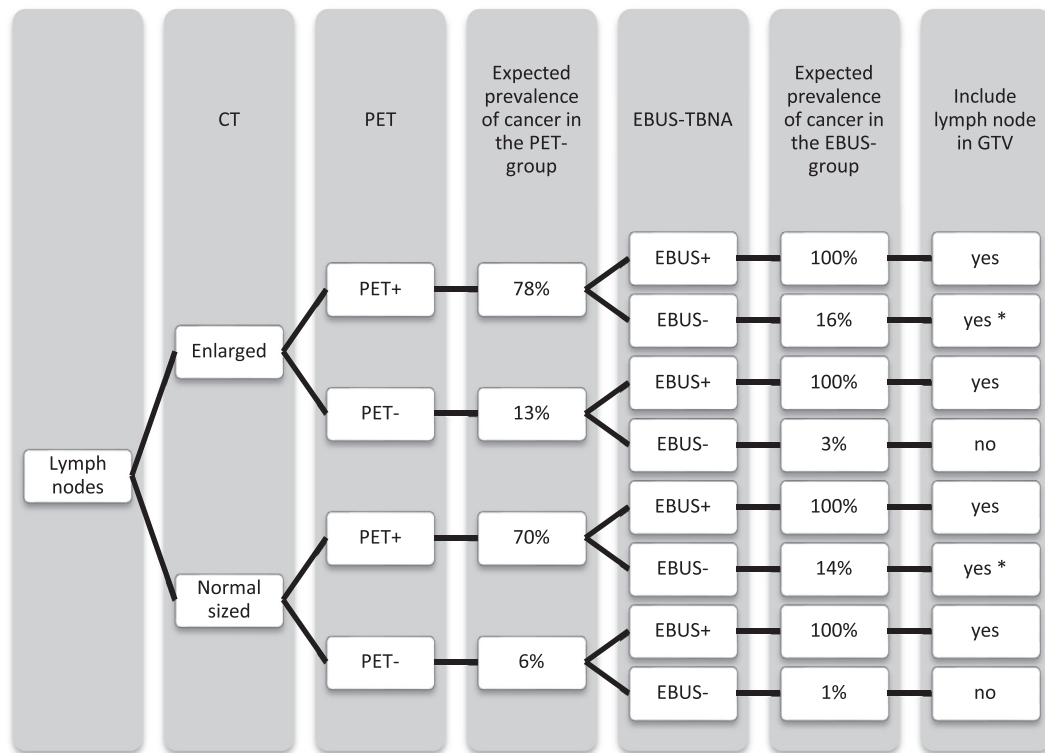


Fig. 1. Proposition of algorithm determining when to include lymph nodes in GTV based on expected prevalence of cancer based on CT, PET and E(B)US in literature, from Peeters [16]. * with the exception of symmetrical FDG-PET positive LN with a non-malignant diagnosis (anthracosis, silicosis, granulomatous disease ...) after adequate full EBUS-mapping.

2a: CTV including the affected lymph node station



2b: CTV including the nodal GTV plus 5-8 mm margin

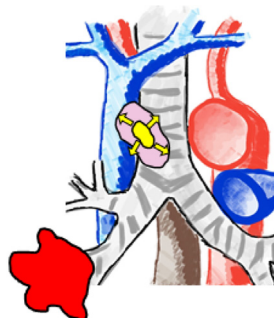


Fig. 2. Illustration of the two options for the definition of nodal CTV as recommended here.

margin may be tailored according to the size of lymph nodes or histology of the primary tumour [20,22] but care should be

taken with respect to neighbouring normal organs (e.g. oesophagus) in order to not increase toxicity.

Beyond this, elective inclusion of the hilum and/or neighbouring nodal lymph node stations can be considered (O). Inclusion of uninvolved areas between involved stations (especially the hilum) is optional (O). Further inclusion of elective lymph nodes in the CTV is not recommended (D).

When post-operative RT (PORT) is indicated in locally advanced NSCLC, the CTV consists of the resected involved anatomical mediastinal lymph node regions, the bronchial stump, the ipsilateral hilum and nodal stations 4 and 7 [24]. All other recommendations given here apply to PORT in analogy.

Planning target volume (PTV)

A margin should be applied around the CTV to create the PTV to account for the geometric uncertainties (M) according to current ICRU recommendations. Sources of uncertainties include delineation errors [25], the inter- and intra-fraction patient (setup), tumour (baseline shift) and tumour motion-related errors (see below). Residual positioning errors depend on the department specific positioning and image guidance policy. These should ideally be quantified in each individual RT department for the relevant treatment settings (R). Manual editing of the PTV should not be performed (D).

For the specific motion-related uncertainties, different policies can be chosen:

1. Delineation of an internal target volume (ITV): it includes all CTV positions during the breathing cycle as per ICRU 62. ITV can be generated either by adding all CTVs from the different breathing phases of the 4DCT (manual delineation on each

- separate CT phase or deformation of the CTV contour from one breathing phase to the others) [26], or by contouring the CTV on a MIP CT.
- Application of the mid-ventilation or mid-position approaches with the tumour motion derived from the 4DCT then being integrated as a random error into the van Herk statistical PTV margin [27]:
 - a mid-ventilation CT approach: the single CT scan closest to the time-averaged position over the breathing cycle is selected from the 4D-CT data set [28–30].
 - a mid-position CT is generated from deformable registration and corresponds to the mean position of the anatomy along the respiratory cycle.
 - Application of respiratory-synchronised techniques, such as gating or tracking, with use of system-specific PTV margins according to departmental definition.

As the motion pattern may differ between the primary tumour and the involved lymph nodes, individualised anisotropic PTV margins should be defined (R) [31].

Organs at risk

For planning of conventionally fractionated or moderately hypo-fractionated RT for locally advanced NSCLC, the mandatory organs at risk to be contoured are: the lungs (both lungs separately and together, both excluding the GTV), the whole heart (optionally also cardiac sub-structures), the oesophagus (from cricoid to oesophageal-gastric junction) and the spinal canal (as a PRV safety surrogate for the spinal cord) (M). Optionally, other structures may be contoured: lungs minus PTV for optimisation purposes, brachial plexus if superior sulcus tumour and if the GTV is adjacent to or abuts the upper thoracic inlet (O). The trachea, proximal bronchial tree, great vessels and chest wall do not need to be defined for conventionally fractionated or moderately hypo-fractionated RT. The delineation of normal tissues should preferably be done using published atlases [32,33] (R).

Re-planning

Adaptive re-planning during the course of irradiation is advised on an individual basis (O) in case CBCT or other information reveals a tumour baseline shift or intrathoracic anatomical changes (e.g. atelectasis, pleural effusion) that have an anticipated significant influence on the dose distribution at any time point [34].

Organisation/responsibilities

It is recommended to develop departmental instructions for delineation (R). For physicians and RT treatment therapists (RTTs) during training, the supervision of delineations by an experienced colleague is mandatory (M). Additionally, hands-on training in an experienced centre or by participation in teaching courses may be helpful (O). All delineation steps for tumour volumes (GTVs, CTVs etc.) should be supervised by radiation oncologists (M) according to local practice, OARs may be contoured by RTTs (O). Final approval of all contours before planning must be performed by a radiation oncologist (M). An additional review by other radiation oncologists is highly recommended because inter-observer variation in the delineation is one of the main uncertainties in RT treatment planning of lung cancer [35] (R). A rigorous peer reviewed quality assurance process at the departmental level and beyond has been advocated to decrease variability in TV delineation in daily practice (R) [36]. In addition, the use of automated training and delineation tools are expected to improve contouring

consistency, provided they have been submitted to a validation process before introduction into daily practice [37].

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

None of the authors has any financial and personal relationships with other people or organisations that could inappropriately influence (bias) of this work.

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