

Understanding Bladder Cancer Staging

What is Cancer Staging?

Staging describes how far the bladder cancer has grown or spread. This helps guide treatment decisions and audit data interpretation. Bladder cancer is typically grouped into early-stage (less serious) and late-stage (more advanced) disease.

TNM system stands for Tumour, Node and Metastasis. It is the most common way to stage bladder cancer. Doctors may also use the number system, but this is less common for bladder cancer.

Tumour (T) - describes the size of the tumour (area of cancer).

Nodes (N) - means your lymph nodes.

Metastasis (M) - describes whether cancer has spread to a different part of the body.

Overview of Bladder Cancer Stages

Stage		Description	Invasiveness
Early Stage	CIS	Stage 0 This is sometimes described as a flat tumour. The cancer cells are only in the inner layer of the bladder lining (urothelium).	Non-muscle invasive
	Ta	Stage 0 The tumour is a mushroom-like growth (papillary cancer). It is only in the inner layer of the bladder lining.	
	T1	Stage 1 Cancer has grown into the inner lining of the bladder but not the muscle	
Late Stage	T2	Stage 2 Cancer has invaded the bladder muscle layer	Muscle invasive
	T3	Stage 3 Cancer has spread beyond the muscle into surrounding fatty tissue	Locally advanced
	T4	Stage 4 Cancer has spread to lymph nodes or distant organs (e.g. lungs, bones)	Metastatic

Term	Meaning
Non-muscle invasive	Includes Stage 0 and 1. More common, often treated with bladder-sparing methods.
Muscle invasive	Includes Stage 2 and above. Usually requires more aggressive treatment.
Locally advanced	Stage 3. Cancer has spread locally but not to distant sites.
Metastatic	Stage 4. Cancer has spread to distant parts of the body.

Diagrammatic Overview

