

*Patients taking Roche's targeted lung cancer drug Alecensa have a far lower risk of their disease spreading in the brain than those on Pfizer's Xalkori, new clinical trial data show.*



*File Photo: The logo of world's biggest maker of cancer drugs Roche is seen at their headquarters before*

The results, which will be presented at the Sept. 8-12 European Society for Medical Oncology congress in Madrid, reinforce Alecensa's position in an increasingly competitive market.

Alecensa is designed to treat advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) in patients with a mutation of the ALK gene, which is found in about 4 percent of all people with NSCLC.

Clinical results in June had already shown Alecensa worked better than Xalkori. The new data adds to evidence of its benefits, with Roche's drug shown to control existing brain metastases and inhibit the formation of new ones.

Among patients who had existing metastases in the central nervous system (CNS), Alecensa reduced the risk of disease progression in the CNS by 60 percent compared to Xalkori, according to a new clinical trial subgroup analysis.

In patients without CNS disease at the start of testing, Alecensa reduced the risk of disease progression in the CNS by 49 percent.

A second study showed an 85 percent reduction in risk of disease worsening or death versus chemotherapy in patients who had previously seen their disease worsen on chemotherapy and Xalkori.

“There are other drugs out there but so far it looks really good for Alecensa,” said Thomas Buechele, Roche’s head of global medical affairs for oncology.

Doctors may use the latest data to decide it makes sense to use the latest generation of drugs as first-line treatment rather than starting with older therapies.

Brain metastases are a major problem because Xalkori does not cross into the central nervous system.

Novartis also has a relatively new drug for ALK+ lung cancer called Zykadia, while Takeda became the latest to join the race in April when it won approval for Alunbrig, a drug it acquired after buying Ariad.

*Source: Reuters*