



# Pembrolizumab

This leaflet is offered as a guide to you and your family. Pembrolizumab is a type of anti-cancer treatment called immunotherapy. The possible benefits of treatment vary. For some people this treatment may control the cancer and its symptoms. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

## Your treatment

Your doctor or nurse clinician has prescribed for you an immune therapy called pembrolizumab (Keytruda<sup>®</sup>). The treatment is usually given every 3 weeks for as long as you are getting a benefit.

Pembrolizumab is given via an infusion (drip) over 30 minutes. You will usually be seen by a doctor or nurse clinician and have a routine blood test before the start of each cycle of treatment.

This treatment can have serious or possibly life-threatening side effects. It is very important that you report side effects straight away. Don't delay, if you feel unwell, please ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658. The lines are open 24 hours a day.

## If you are taking any other medicines

It is important to tell the doctor if you are taking medicine for any other condition. Some medicines can react/interfere with pembrolizumab, so always tell your doctor about any other medicines or tablets you are taking.

Make sure your doctor knows if you:

- have any auto immune disease
- have had any inflammation of the lungs (pneumonitis), HIV or hepatitis.

## Infusion related reactions

Occasionally side effects can occur while you are having the infusion. These may include chills, fever and shivering. If you have any of these side effects please tell your nurse straight away. However, your progress will be monitored regularly.

Rarely, you may also develop a skin rash, headache, sore throat or sickness. If this happens or you notice any swelling around the eyes and face, feel dizzy or faint, or have any shortness of breath during the treatment, please tell the nurse or doctor immediately. This may be an allergic reaction and the drip may need to be slowed down or stopped. You may feel tired or have a headache. These symptoms are related to your treatment and usually go when the infusion has finished.

If you do have any reactions to your treatment, we may be able to give you medication to prevent this on your next infusion.

## **Possible side effects**

Many patients do not get any side effects with pembrolizumab. The most common side effects are related to the way that the drug treats the cancer by boosting the immune system. They are generally different from the side effects which occur following chemotherapy. Some are more likely to occur than others. We are all different, so we may get different side effects with varying severity.

### **Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)**

- **Fatigue**

Pembrolizumab may make you feel tired and lacking in energy. It can be frustrating when you feel unable to cope with routine tasks. If you do feel tired, take rest and get help with household chores. If necessary, take time off work. Gentle exercise such as walking can be beneficial. IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROFOUND TIREDNESS, when you do not feel able to get out of bed or feel dizzy or faint, contact the Hotline number. This may be related to inflammation of the hormone-producing glands (see below).

- **Skin rash**

This can vary from mild to severe. Contact The Christie Hotline or your medical team if the rash covers more than half of your body, if it is very itchy or painful, if you develop blisters or peeling skin, or if you have sores in your mouth.

- **Shortness of breath or coughing**

This treatment can cause shortness of breath or a cough.

### **Rare but potentially serious side effects (1 in 100)**

- **Inflammation of the lungs**

Rarely this information can cause inflammation of the lungs which is potentially serious. Call the Hotline if you have any shortness of breath or a cough.

- **Diarrhoea**

If diarrhoea occurs you should take loperamide. Take 2 tablets as soon as the first liquid stool occurs. Then take one capsule with each liquid stool up to a maximum of 8 in 24 hours. If you continue to have more than 3 liquid stools a day, if you are having diarrhoea at night or if the diarrhoea continues for more than 3 days contact The Christie Hotline number for advice. You should also contact the Hotline if you have any blood or mucous in your stools, or they become a darker colour.

If you develop any tenderness or pain in your abdomen ring The Christie Hotline.

- **Inflammation of the liver**

We will be checking your liver blood tests before each infusion but contact The Christie if you develop yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice) have very dark urine or pain on the right side of your stomach.

- **Inflammation of the hormone producing glands**

Sometimes pembrolizumab may cause inflammation of the glands that produce vital hormones (especially the pituitary, adrenal and thyroid glands) which in turn can affect the way they work. Contact the hospital if you develop any of the following: headaches, blurred or double vision, profound tiredness, decreased sexual drive or if you become irritable or forgetful.

- **Inflammation of the nerves**

Contact the hospital if you develop muscle weakness, numbness or tingling in your hands or feet or any dizziness or loss of consciousness.

- **Inflammation of the eyes**

Sometimes pembrolizumab can cause the eyes to become inflamed. Contact the hospital if you develop any redness or pain in your eye or you develop any problems with your vision.

- **Inflammation of the bowel leading to bowel perforation**

Rarely the bowel can become very inflamed and this can lead to a small hole developing in the wall of the bowel (perforation). You will be closely monitored for this but if you develop diarrhoea as described above, any abdominal pain or blood or mucous in the stools, contact The Christie Hotline immediately.

- **Immune-related kidney problems**

This is caused when the kidneys become inflamed and can stop working properly. We will be monitoring your kidney function carefully but contact the hotline if you find that you are very tired or if you notice that you are passing less urine than usual.

### **Serious and potentially life threatening side effects**

In a very small number of patients immunotherapy can cause very severe side effects which may rarely result in permanent disability or death. Should you wish to discuss this further ask the team caring for you.

Not all side effects are listed above and there may be some rare and unusual side effects that we are unaware of. Please contact the medical team if you experience any unusual symptoms.

### **Sex, contraception & fertility**

It is important that you do not get pregnant or father a child whilst on immunotherapy. There is evidence that these drugs can affect the unborn child. It is important that you use effective birth control for as long as you are on the treatment and for at least 4 months after.

Women should stop breastfeeding while being treated with pembrolizumab since it is unknown if the medication is excreted through breast milk.

### **Fertility**

We do not know if pembrolizumab affects fertility.

## Late side effects

Long term possible side effects of treatment with pembrolizumab are not yet known. Speak with your doctor if you wish to discuss this further.

## Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring:-

- Jackie Hodgetts on 0161 446 3868
- General enquires on 0161 446 3000

For urgent advice ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658 (24 hours)

Your consultant is: .....

Your hospital number is: .....

Your key worker is: .....



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Details of the sources used are available, please contact [Patient.Information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:Patient.Information@christie.nhs.uk)