

Pembrolizumab (Lung)

Pembrolizumab is a type of anti-cancer treatment called immunotherapy. The possible benefits of treatment vary, from controlling the cancer, to reducing the 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.

The treatment is usually given every 3 or 6 weeks for as long as you are tolerating the treatment and getting a benefit. This course of treatment can be given for up to a maximum of 2 years.

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 medicines for any other condition as some medicines can react/interfere with pembrolizumab.

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, even though 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 resolve 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.



Flu vaccinations

Is it alright for me to have a flu jab during the time I'm having chemotherapy?

It's safe to have a flu jab, but depending on the sort of chemotherapy you have had, it may not give quite as much protection against infection as usual. Some patients may need 2 vaccinations. However, if you're thinking of having any other vaccinations, do check with your Christie doctor first, because some vaccines should be avoided.

COVID-19 vaccinations

We advise that all patients receive a COVID-19 vaccination when this is offered. Your doctor will discuss with you the best time to have this.

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 Christie Hotline number on **0161 446 3658**. This may be related to inflammation of the hormone-producing glands (see below).

• Decreased appetite

Pembrolizumab may reduce your appetite. However, it is important to maintain a moderate diet during treatment. If you are struggling to maintain this, please contact your GP or medical team for advice.

• Diarrhoea

If diarrhoea occurs you should take loperamide. Take 2 tablets as soon as the first liquid stool occurs. Then take 1 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 on **0161 446 3658** for advice. You should also contact The Hotline if you have any blood or mucus in your stools, or they become a darker colour.

If you develop any tenderness or pain in your abdomen, ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

• Nausea and vomiting (sickness)

The severity of this varies from person to person. Anti-sickness medication may be given if you experience symptoms. If you continue to feel or be sick, contact your GP or The Christie Hotline.

• Constipation

If you develop constipation, try to eat plenty of fluids and eat foods high in fibre. Tell your doctor who may prescribe a suitable laxative.

• Skin rash

This can vary from mild to severe. Contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** 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.

• Inflammation of the lungs

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

- **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 Christie 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 its wall (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 on **0161 446 3658** 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 Christie Hotline if you find that you are very tired or if you notice that you are passing less urine than usual.

- **Muscle and joint pain**

Muscle and joint problems may occur with pembrolizumab. Tell your doctor or specialist nurse at once if you get new or worsening muscle or joint pain that does not go away.

- **Bruising or bleeding**

Occasionally this treatment can affect platelets which help the blood clot. Tell your doctor if you have any unexplained bruising or bleeding, such as nosebleeds, blood-spots or rashes on the skin and bleeding gums.

- **Infection**

If you feel unwell, you have symptoms of infection or your temperature is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C **contact The Christie Hotline straight away.**

Serious and potentially life threatening side effects

In a small proportion of patients immunotherapy can result in very severe side effects which may rarely result in 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 and fertility

It is important that you do not get pregnant or father a child while 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:

For urgent advice ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658 (24 hours a day, seven days a week)

- The nurse specialist or nurse clinician for your clinical team
- General enquires on **0161 446 3000**

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

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If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week