



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Pembrolizumab

Other names: KEYTRUDA®

- **Pembrolizumab** (pem" broe liz' ue mab) is a drug that is used to treat some types of cancer. It is a monoclonal antibody, a type of protein designed to [help your own body's immune system target cancer cells to stop them from growing](#). It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to pembrolizumab before receiving pembrolizumab.
- A **blood test** may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your treatment may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- Other drugs may **interact** with pembrolizumab. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start or stop taking any other drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of pembrolizumab.
- Pembrolizumab may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with pembrolizumab and for at least 4 months after the last dose. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breastfeed during treatment and for at least 4 months after the last dose.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with pembrolizumab before you receive any treatment from them.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. **Your treatment is a type of therapy known as immunotherapy and it may cause serious side effects related to your immune system. It is important to report side effects immediately to your doctor. Do not manage side effects at home without speaking with your doctor. Symptoms may be delayed and can develop months after your last dose. Refer to specific protocol handout (if available) for more details.**

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Allergic reactions may rarely occur. Signs of an allergic reaction may include flushing, rash, itching, dizziness, swelling or breathing problems. This can occur immediately or several hours after receiving pembrolizumab.</p>	<p>Tell your nurse if this happens while you are receiving pembrolizumab or contact your oncologist immediately if this happens after you leave the clinic.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
Diarrhea may sometimes occur.	See your doctor or get emergency help.
Your white blood cells may decrease after your treatment. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.	To help prevent infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your doctor immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.
Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment. Most people have little or no nausea.	See or call your doctor as soon as possible.
Skin rashes may sometimes occur.	
Constipation may sometimes occur.	
Sugar control may commonly be affected in diabetic patients.	
Loss of appetite and weight loss sometimes occur.	
Headache , and/or muscle pain or joint pain may sometimes occur.	
Tiredness and lack of energy commonly occur.	
Swelling of hands, feet, or lower legs may sometimes occur if your body retains extra fluid.	
You may sometimes have trouble sleeping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping. • This will return to normal when you stop taking pembrolizumab.
Increase in cholesterol or triglycerides (one of the types of fat in the blood) may sometimes occur.	Discuss this with your doctor if you have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A history of heart disease. • High blood pressure. • High cholesterol or triglycerides. You may need to have your cholesterol level checked a few months after starting pembrolizumab.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Hair loss does not occur with pembrolizumab.	

SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling, or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), shaking chills; severe sore throat, productive cough (coughing up thick or green sputum); cloudy or foul smelling urine; painful, tender, or swollen red skin wounds or sores.
- **Diarrhea** or changes in **bowel habits**; black, tarry stools; blood or mucous in the stool; severe **abdominal pain**.
- Signs of **lung problems** such as new or worsening cough, chest pain, coughing blood, shortness of breath, or difficulty in breathing.
- Signs of **kidney problems** such as lower back or side pain, blood in the urine, swelling of feet or lower legs, or change in amount or colour of urine.
- Signs of **blood sugar problems** such as thirst and frequent need to pass urine.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.
- Signs of **thyroid problems** such as unusual weight gain or loss, feeling hot or cold, deepened voice, or unusual tiredness or weakness.
- **Changes in eyesight, eye pain, or redness.**
- Skin **rash, blisters**, or itching.

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Headache not controlled with acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®).
- Changes in skin colour (lightening).
- Irritability or forgetfulness.
- Decreased sex drive.

REPORT ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS TO YOUR DOCTOR
