



Pembrolizumab

What names may be used for this medication?

Keytruda, Pembro

How and why is this medicine given?

Pembrolizumab is given by an intravenous (IV) infusion (a slow drip through a needle into your port or through a vein in your arm or hand) to treat many different types of cancers. We use pembrolizumab most commonly in our office for the treatment of cervix, uterine and recurrent ovarian cancers. It may be used by itself or combined with other chemotherapy drugs.

How does the medicine work?

Pembrolizumab is part of a large class of drugs called checkpoint inhibitors. Checkpoints are normal in your immune system and are designed to help your immune system tell the difference between normal and foreign or bad cells. These checkpoints also keep your immune system from being “too strong” and attacking your own tissues. Cancer cells use these same checkpoints to “hide” from your immune system. By interfering with these immune system checkpoints, your immune system has a better chance of locating and killing your cancer cells. Pembrolizumab specifically blocks receptors on tumor cells (PD-1) to allow your own immune system to better identify, target, and kill the cancer cells. The side effects you

WATSON CLINIC

Your Central Florida Center for Gynecologic Cancer Care

1755 N. Florida Avenue ♦ Lakeland, Florida 33805 ♦ 863-680-7578 ♦ Fax: 863-616-2415

www.WatsonClinic.com/GynOnc

experience from pembrolizumab are a result of this immune system response. We will review your list of medications that you take for other medical problems (diabetes, blood pressure, etc.) at each visit to be sure that none of these other medicines are interfering with the pembrolizumab.

How often is this medicine given?

Pembrolizumab is typically given once every 3 – 6 weeks depending on circumstances. Whether treatment will be given with other chemotherapies or alone will be determined by your provider. The most appropriate route of administration and total number of treatments recommended will vary based on your clinical circumstances, but an initial plan will be outlined for you by your doctor. The infusions are given in the infusion center at the Cancer and Research Center (white building located across the parking lot from our office). Prior to each treatment, you will be seen in the office for an exam, and blood tests will be reviewed to be sure it is safe to administer your next treatment. It is, of course, very important to keep all appointments for treatment and lab testing.

What side effects does this medicine cause?

There are many possible side effects of all immune therapy drugs, so the following is only inclusive of the most common or serious possibilities from pembrolizumab. You will be asked to complete a symptom form at each visit for us to accurately assess the side effects that you may be experiencing. This form helps your doctor be sure that no adverse effects of treatment are overlooked, and it serves to help you recall which symptoms you may have experienced since your last treatment.

- ❖ Fatigue
- ❖ Nausea and diarrhea can be common with pembrolizumab but are typically not severe. Drink plenty of water. Avoid foods that can make diarrhea worse such as alcohol, caffeine, and spicy foods.

- ❖ Skin rash, itching, skin peeling can be seen with immune therapy and should be reported to your provider.
 - ❖ Thyroid and other hormone gland disturbances can also occur. Symptoms can include headaches, eye problems, rapid heartbeat, swelling, extreme tiredness, weight gain, or weight loss. We monitor the most likely hormone abnormalities regularly with blood testing during treatment to detect any abnormality as soon as possible.
 - ❖ Achy joints or muscles
 - ❖ When given with other chemotherapy agents, bone marrow suppression can occur. This is when the bone marrow cannot make enough red cells, white cells, or platelets to keep up with demand. All of your blood counts will be monitored regularly throughout treatment.
 - ◆ *Anemia* is the result of not enough red blood cells and may cause fatigue, chest pain, shortness of breath, or dizziness.
 - ◆ *Neutropenia* results when your white blood cell count goes too low, and this will put you at an increased risk for infection. It is particularly important that you avoid sick friends and family; be diligent about hand-washing as well. This does not mean that you cannot be out in public, and in fact you can continue to participate in normal activities such as going to church or a movie, etc. If you think you may have an infection or have a fever of 100.5°F or more, call the office immediately.
 - ◆ *Thrombocytopenia* is the term for too low of a platelet count. This can lead to excessive bruising or bleeding with only minor injury such as brushing your teeth or blowing your nose.
 - ❖ Lung problems can be seen in patients taking pembrolizumab. If you experience cough, shortness of breath or chest pain, make your provider aware. You will be monitored regularly with CT scans for a very serious but rare (1%) side effect called pulmonary interstitial fibrosis.
 - ❖ If you are pregnant or become pregnant during therapy, you should notify your doctor immediately.
-