

# Kaposi Sarcoma: Immunotherapy



## What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is also called biologic therapy. It's a type of treatment that boosts your immune system to help it find and kill cancer cells. It does this using manmade versions of substances that are normally made in the body and boost the immune system.

## When might immunotherapy be used to treat Kaposi sarcoma?

Immunotherapy is not a common treatment for Kaposi sarcoma (KS). It might be used if other treatments aren't working or KS comes back after treatment.

## What immunotherapy medicines are used to treat Kaposi sarcoma?

The main immunotherapy medicine used to treat KS is a manmade version of interferon-alfa. Interferon-alfa is a chemical in the body that normally helps boost the immune system. It's thought to help the immune system fight off viral infections.

Other immunotherapy medicines that can be used are:

- Thalidomide
- Pomalidomide
- Lenalidomide

Many other kinds of immunotherapy medicines are also showing promise. These aren't widely used at this time but might be available in a clinical trial.

## How is immunotherapy given?

Interferon-alfa is given daily as a shot (injection). It's injected either into a muscle (intramuscular, or IM) or under the skin (subcutaneous, or sub-q). You or a caregiver can learn to give these shots at home.

The other medicines are pills you take at home.

## What are common side effects of immunotherapy?

Interferon-alfa often causes flu-like symptoms, such as fever, severe tiredness (fatigue), weakness, and muscle pain. People often feel sick while getting this treatment, which is one of the reasons it's not used often. It can also cause liver problems, low blood cell counts, and confusion or mood changes.

Thalidomide and the medicines related to it can cause serious blood clots. They can also lower your blood cell counts and cause constipation, nerve damage, nausea, and fatigue.

## Working with your healthcare provider

It's important to know which medicines you're taking. Write down the names of your medicines and how to take them. Ask your healthcare team how they work and what side effects they might cause. Always take medicines exactly as directed by your healthcare provider.

Talk with your healthcare providers about what symptoms to watch for and when to call them. Make sure you know what number to call with questions. Is there a different number for evenings, holidays, and weekends?

It may be helpful to keep a diary of your side effects. A written list will make it easier for you to remember your questions when you go to your appointments. It will also make it easier for you to work with your healthcare team to make a plan to manage your side effects.

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