

Interferon alfa-2b for melanoma

Description

Interferon alfa-2b (also known as Intron-A[®]) is being used to treat your melanoma. It is a colorless liquid that is injected under the skin or given by vein.

Interferon alfa-2b can pose a health hazard to caregivers. All caregivers should take safety precautions while giving this drug. For 48 hours after this drug is given, the patient's body fluids can contain the drug. During that 48-hour period, caregivers should follow safety guidelines when handling the patient's vomit, blood, urine, and bowel movements, including diapers. These guidelines include wearing gloves when cleaning up body fluids. For a complete list of safety precautions, see "Do you know... Protecting caregivers from drug hazards."

How to give interferon alfa-2b

You will get your first month of treatment by vein at St. Jude. You will not have to stay overnight in the hospital to do this. Most of this treatment is given at home after you have moved to the portion of therapy that gives shots under the skin. You will learn how to give these shots while you are at the hospital.

A nurse will teach you how to inject the medicine under the skin. Please refer to the handout "Do you know... How to give a subcutaneous injection" for details.

Dosing

The staff will draw blood samples every week to monitor blood counts and liver function. It is common for your dose to change based on changes in blood counts or liver function. Do not give the shots until you have been told what the dose will be. Your nurse will give you a dosing record sheet to keep up with all the dose changes and the dates the new dose began. This will help you keep up with the right dose.

Important

This medicine is available in many strengths. Always check the strength of medicine each time you pick up a new supply. If the strength is different, then the amount of medicine you give will change. Talk to a nurse or pharmacist at St. Jude with questions about dosing if you receive a different strength of medicine.

How to store interferon

Sometimes, interferon comes as a liquid that is already in a vial. At other times, it is as a powder in a vial packaged in a box with a liquid. Both forms need to be stored in the refrigerator before use. You will add the

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liquid to the powder form in the vial. The nurse will show you how to do this. Withdraw your dose from the vial, and discard any medicine that remains in the vial.

Possible side effects

Early

- Pain, bruising, or swelling at the injection site
- Flu-like symptoms that may occur include high fever, vomiting, chills, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, and a tired feeling.

Later (usually more than a day after treatment starts)

- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Low blood counts
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Rash
- Feeling dizzy, confused, or very tired
- Bloating, feeling puffy, and swelling
- Temporary changes in liver function

These are the most common side effects, but there may be others. Please report all side effects to the doctor or nurse.

In case of a severe side effect or reaction, call the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist at 595-3300. If you are outside the Memphis area, dial toll-free 1-866-2STJUDE (1-866-278-5833), and press 0 once the call is connected.

Special instructions

- Drink plenty of fluid while you are receiving this medicine. Ask your doctor or nurse how much you should drink each day.
- The doctor may give you Trilisate[®] (choline-mag salicylate) or Advil[®] (ibuprofen) to treat the flu-like symptoms. It is very important that you take this medicine 30 minutes before your injection of interferon.

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