CUTANEOUS LYMPHOMA FOUNDATION

IMIQUIMOD
Expert review and update by: Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation's Writers Bureau

WHAT IS IMIQUIMOD?

Brand Name: Aldara®

Topical imiquimod (Aldara®) is a class of medications called immune response modifiers, and works by stimulating the release of immune-activating chemicals in the skin called cytokines, such as interferon. While the exact mechanism behind the anti-tumoral response is unclear, stimulation of local cytokines is thought to lead to immune activation and attack on tumor cells by the immune system.

HOW IS IT DELIVERED?

Imiquimod is a topical cream applied to the skin surface. It is typically applied 3 times per week to areas of disease, though the frequency may be adjusted depending on medication tolerability and the recommendations of your provider.

WHAT IS THE EXPECTED RESULT?

Disease in the treated area will gradually improve after several weeks of treatment. Some patients experience a complete clearance of the disease, while others may notice only partial improvement. There may be some redness, itching, and mild irritation in the treated areas; this is a sign that the medication is working.

ARE THERE SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS TO BE AWARE OF?

Imiquimod cream is distributed in small packets, making it difficult to use over larger areas of the body. It may cause significant irritation and should be used with caution or avoided in sensitive areas of the body, such as around the eyes or in the genital region.

WHAT ARE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS?

The following is not an exhaustive list of the possible side effects. For a complete list of possible side effects, please see the manufacturer's available information on the specific therapy.

The most common side effect is local skin irritation. The skin may become red, itchy, or sometimes painful from inflammation triggered by the medication. In severe cases, the skin may develop an open erosion or ulcer, at which point the treatment should be stopped.

Rarely, flu-like symptoms may occur as a result of immune activation caused by the medication.