



## **KAPOSI'S SARCOMA (KS)**

### **What is KS?**

KS, or Kaposi's sarcoma, is a type of skin cancer that people with HIV/AIDS sometimes get. KS is more common in men than in women. Most often it shows up on your skin or in your mouth but it can also affect your lungs and stomach.

### **What KS looks like**

KS often appears as red, pink or purple spots on your skin. These spots are usually the size of a dime when you first notice them on your skin. They can be flat or bumpy and most often look like bruises that do not go away. KS spots are called "lesions" and do not hurt or itch. As your immune system gets weaker, more can show up and they often get larger.

When someone has KS in their lungs it can be very serious because it makes them cough and makes it difficult to breathe. If someone has KS in their mouth it often makes it hard to eat or swallow. When it is in the stomach it can cause pain and bleeding.

### **What you should look for**

If you notice bruises on your body that do not go away after a few weeks or new coloured patches that are raised a bit, go and show them to your doctor, nurse or CHR. They may just be bruises but, to be sure, the doctor will need to look at the spot more closely.



## **Information for Inuit Community Members**

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#### **What the doctor can do**

To look at the spot more closely, the doctor will want to take a sample of the spot to look at it under a microscope. This is a very simple thing to do and only takes a few minutes. First the doctor will spray a painkiller on your skin so you don't feel anything. Then he or she will cut a small piece of the spot to send to a laboratory and have it looked at under a microscope.

#### **What you can do about KS**

If there are just a few KS spots on your body that are covered up by clothes, you and your doctor may decide not to do anything about those spots. If there is a spot on your face, you can wear a cream to cover it up. Sometimes your doctor may spray a medication on the spot to make it get smaller.

Some people find that their KS spots go away when they take the AIDS cocktail (also known as combination therapy, see *Treatment Fact Sheet #1*). This happens because the AIDS cocktail helps your immune system get better and so it can fight KS. The AIDS cocktail usually takes a few months to help your immune system. Be patient and take your medication the way your doctor or nurse tells you.

If you have many KS spots on your skin or if it is found inside your body, your doctor may recommend a medicine called chemotherapy, or chemo, to fight the KS. Chemo can make the KS get smaller. But it can cause short-term problems like fever, tiredness, vomiting or diarrhea. This is not a medicine that doctors use unless you have a lot of KS or it is causing problems inside your body that are making it difficult for you to eat or breathe.



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**Common questions people ask about KS:**

***Q: Will KS go away if I just ignore it?***

**A:** No. KS will not go away on its own although it sometimes becomes less noticeable. It is important to talk to your doctor about any change that happens to your body so he or she can help you make good decisions about your health.

***Q: Will I die from KS?***

**A:** No. KS will not kill you but it can cause problems that may threaten your life. If you have concerns about KS, it is important to talk to your doctor, nurse or CHR about them.

***Q: Can I give KS to someone else?***

**A:** The germ that causes KS is spread by having unprotected sex. So it is important to protect the people you have sex with by always using a condom.

***Q: Does having KS mean I have to take more pills?***

**A:** Not usually. The medicine that doctors use to treat KS is usually not available in pills. If you are taking the AIDS cocktail already, you may find that the spots are not as noticeable.

**Credits**

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*This is one of a series of information updates for Inuit community members to learn more about the medicines and other kinds of treatments some people with HIV/AIDS use to fight HIV and AIDS. If you have questions or want more information, talk to your doctor, nurse or CHR.*

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