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PROGRAMME FOR LOCAL
CANCER PATIENTS**



September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month [email info@cics.ky](mailto:info@cics.ky)

Childhood cancer is rare, thankfully, and despite the devastating impact a diagnosis has on parents, and children of course, 85% of children with cancer who receive timely and appropriate treatment will live normal lives and live for at least five years after their original diagnosis.

However, despite these obvious gains in outcomes, cancer remains the leading cause of death by disease past infancy among children in the United States, along with many other nations. Over the last 25 years, the incidence of cancer in children has increased, too, although more recently this increase appears to have stabilised.

WHAT CAUSES CHILDHOOD CANCER?

Cancer starts when cells in the body begin to grow out of control. In children cancer is not caused by lifestyle choices such as smoking or obesity and it is thought that environment plays only a small role.

Rarely, cancer in children is caused when a gene is passed from parent to child.

Most cancer in children stems from mutations to a child's genetic material, early in life or before a child is born.

This genetic material, DNA, is duplicated again and again as cells divide and sometimes that duplication isn't a perfect copy.

Rapidly growing and dividing cells contribute to this. It's known as an acquired mutation and can happen to anybody at any time of life. Acquired mutations only affect an individual's own cancer cells and so are not passed to their children.

TYPES OF CANCER THAT DEVELOP IN CHILDREN

The most common kind of cancer in children is leukaemia, accounting for 30% of all cancers. The other two main types of cancer are lymphoma and brain and central nervous system tumours.

Other cancers include bone cancers (osteosarcoma and Ewing sarcoma), kidney cancer (Wilms tumour), cancer of the retina in the eye (retinoblastoma) and neuroblastoma.

What are warning signs of cancer in children?

- Unexplained extensive bruising, blood spots or bleeding
- Unexplained weight loss
- Persistent headache – especially if overnight or early morning, or associated with persistent vomiting.
- Unexplained persistent bone pain or limping
- A lump in the abdomen
- Visible blood in the urine
- Severe tiredness
- Night sweats
- Sudden unexplained change in behaviour
- A white pupil instead of red eye on a photograph

SURVIVAL FROM CANCER

Over the last 50 years, survival from children's cancer has improved dramatically, especially for children with leukaemia where five-year survival rates, based on UK National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service data, show an increase from 79% in 1997-2001 to 89% by 2012-2016.

For some other types of childhood cancer, mortality rates are still unacceptably high and 2.2 per 100,000 children and adolescents in the USA still die of cancer each year indicating that new advances and continued research to identify effective treatments are required.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM WORRIED MY CHILD HAS CANCER?

If you are worried your child may have cancer, take them to see your paediatrician, who will take a detailed history and examine your child.

Depending on what they find, they may order a set of blood tests and engage in other physical investigations, for instance an ultrasound scan of the abdomen.

LONG-TERM SIDE EFFECTS OF CANCER TREATMENT IN CHILDREN

Children are growing when they receive cancer treatment, and so they are much more likely to have long-term side effects of treatment, both mental and physical.

Some of these effects include poor growth, loss of fertility and increased risk of second cancers. As a result, children are followed up life-long after cancer. Much cancer research today is also about trying to reduce these risks, not just addressing the effects.

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