

Childhood cancer: 3 most common types

September 8 2021, by Laurel Kelly



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September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn about three of the most common types of cancers in children: acute lymphocytic leukemia, neuroblastoma and pediatric brain tumors.

Acute lymphocytic leukemia

Acute lymphocytic leukemia is a [cancer](#) of the blood and bone marrow. It's the most common type of cancer in [children](#), and treatments result in a good chance for a cure. Acute lymphocytic leukemia also can occur in adults, though the chance of a cure is greatly reduced.

Signs and symptoms of [acute lymphocytic leukemia](#) can include bleeding from the gums; bone pain; fever; pale skin; shortness of breath; and swollen lymph nodes in and around the neck, armpits, abdomen or groin.

Treatment for acute lymphocytic leukemia includes chemotherapy, targeted therapy, radiation and bone marrow transplant. There's also a specialized treatment called chimeric antigen receptor-T cell therapy that takes your body's germ-fighting T cells, engineers them to fight cancer, and infuses them back into your body.

Neuroblastoma

Neuroblastoma is a cancer that develops from immature nerve cells found in several areas of the body. It most commonly affects children 5 or younger, though it may rarely occur in older children.

Signs and symptoms of neuroblastoma vary, depending on what part of the body is affected. Neuroblastoma in the abdomen—the most common form—can cause abdominal pain; a mass under the skin that isn't tender when touched; and changes in bowel habits, such as diarrhea or constipation. Neuroblastoma in the chest can cause wheezing; chest pain; and changes to the eyes, including drooping eyelids and unequal pupil size. Other signs and symptoms that can indicate neuroblastoma include back pain, fever, unexplained weight loss and bone pain.

The treatment plan for [neuroblastoma](#) is based on several factors that affect the child's prognosis, including the child's age, the stage of the cancer, the types of cells involved in the cancer, and whether there are any abnormalities in the chromosomes and genes. Treatment can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, bone marrow transplant and immunotherapy.

Pediatric brain tumors

There are many types of [pediatric brain tumors](#). Some are noncancerous, or benign, and some are cancerous, or malignant.

Signs and symptoms of a [brain](#) tumor in children vary greatly, depending on the brain tumor type, size, location and rate of growth. Some signs and symptoms may not be easy to detect because they're similar to symptoms of other conditions. Some of the more common symptoms of a brain tumor in children include headaches, which may become more frequent and more severe; feeling of increased pressure in the head; unexplained nausea or vomiting; and abrupt onset of vision problems, such as double vision.

Treatment of a pediatric brain tumor depends on the type of [tumor](#), its location within the brain, whether it has spread, and the child's age and general health. Because new treatments and technologies are being developed continually, several options may be available at different points in treatment. And treatment for brain tumors in children typically is quite different from treatment for adult brain tumors, so it's important to enlist the expertise and experience of pediatric specialists in neurology and cancer. Treatment can include surgery, traditional radiation therapy, proton beam therapy, radiosurgery, chemotherapy and targeted drug therapy.

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Citation: Childhood cancer: 3 most common types (2021, September 8) retrieved 1 February 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-childhood-cancer-common.html>

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