



# PARENT

# HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2019

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<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# WHEN A CHILD HAS CANCER



**W**hile cancer is uncommon in children, it can still happen. The most common childhood cancers are leukemia, lymphoma, and brain cancer. As kids enter the teen years, osteosarcoma, or bone cancer, is more common. Most of the time, doctors do not know why kids get cancer. In most cases, however, childhood cancers come from random mutations, or changes, in the genes of growing cells.

### What is cancer?

Cancer happens when cells that are abnormal grow very fast and do not know when to stop, destroying neighboring cells. Cancer takes a person's strength, hurts organs and bones, and weakens the body's defenses against other illnesses.

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Because cancer in children comes from random mutations that are unpredictable, there is no way to prevent it. It is also easy for doctors to suspect other childhood illnesses when cancer symptoms first appear because some symptoms, such as fever, swollen glands, frequent infections, anemia, or bruises, can happen with other, more common childhood infections or conditions.

### Treatment

Once a child has been diagnosed, understanding the plan for treatment, the potential effect that treatment might have on the child's day-to-day life, and how the family can plan for the future is important. Here are some ideas to help you keep track of treatment information:

- Get to know the people on your child's cancer care team and what they do.
- Get a notebook to bring to all your child's appointments to take notes and write down questions before and after the visit.
- Ask a family member or friend to be there to take notes when you talk with health-care professionals about treatments or how they are helping your child get better.
- Ask staff to repeat information or explain something in a new way if you do not understand.
- Take time to read all the information the treatment team gives you.
- Ask for help in getting a second opinion.
- Ask the medical team to teach you what you need to know to care for your child at home. If your child is in the hospital, ask about classes for parents of children with cancer.

The goal when treating kids with cancer is to cure them. This takes priority over

everything else, even if it means unwanted side effects as a result of treatment.

When possible, include your child in the cancer treatment discussions. Talk to your child about medicine they are taking and the next steps in their treatment to reduce fear and misunderstanding.

A lot of kids feel guilty or think that somehow the cancer is their fault. Members of the cancer treatment team can be a great help in reassuring them that is not the case and helping them understand the facts about the specific type of cancer they have.

*Try to find ways to keep as many things the same as possible or create new predictable routines around treatment schedules. It can take a little while to get through the initial shock of learning about your child's illness, so don't be afraid to ask for help from people in your community and family.*

### Coping

No one is ever prepared to hear that his or her child has a life-threatening illness. Parents have a lot to manage after a child is diagnosed with cancer and it can be overwhelming. Just remember that part of what helps kids cope with cancer is their siblings and other family members.

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around treatment schedules. It can take a little while to get through the initial shock of learning about your child's illness, so don't be afraid to ask for help from people in your community and family.

### SOURCES

- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cancer.html>
- <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/adjusting-to-cancer/talk-to-children>
- <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/children-and-cancer/when-your-child-has-cancer/after-diagnosis/for-parents.html>

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