

Cancer Information Sheet

Cancer begins when cells in a part of the body grow out of control. Instead of dying, cancer cells form new, abnormal cells known as tumors. Some of the cancer cells get into the bloodstream or lymph vessels of the body and invade other tissues. This process, called metastasis, is something that normal cells cannot do.

Cancer is identified by the place where it began. For example, neuroblastoma that has spread to the bones is still neuroblastoma, not bone cancer.

Different types of cancer can behave very differently. They grow at different rates and respond to different treatments. That is why children with cancer need treatment aimed at their particular kind of cancer.

Symptoms

Symptoms depend on the type of cancer and its location. Some symptoms can mimic common illnesses such as the flu, a cold or a migraine headache.

Treatment

Childhood cancers are often more curable than cancer in adults. The goal of treatment is to attack abnormal cells, while hurting as few healthy cells as possible. To treat the cancer, a child may require more than one therapy. These may include the following:

- Chemotherapy to kill cancer cells using strong medicine
- Surgery to remove all or part of a tumor
- Radiation to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors using high-energy waves

Educational Implications

Some children are concerned that others will stare at them due to their hair loss.

Some children worry that teachers will be upset because of absences from school.

Some children may not want to talk about their condition or about how they feel.

At many different times during their treatment and recovery, people with cancer may be fearful and anxious. Some signs and symptoms of fear and anxiety include anxious expression, difficulty completing work and concentrating, trembling or shaking, restlessness, angry outbursts and dry mouth.

Educational Options

Those students whose cancer adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.