

## Childhood cancer: sources of information and support

### Key facts:

- Around 1900 children (up to age 15) are diagnosed with cancer each year in the UK
- The causes of childhood cancers are not well understood, but unlike adult cancers, nothing you have done has caused the cancer.
- You cannot catch cancer from someone that has it.
- We are good at treating many types of childhood cancers, and most children (more than 8 in 10) will survive.

## I am worried my child has cancer

Cancer symptoms depend on the type of cancer and where it is in the body. They can also be quite vague, varied and are **usually caused by something other than cancer**. It is important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of cancer as the earlier cancer is diagnosed, the more successful treatment might be.

The most common cancer types in children are leukaemia (30%), brain and spinal tumours (26%) and lymphomas (11%). Almost 50% of all cases of childhood cancer are in children aged 0-4 years old.

### What are the most common cancer symptoms in children and young people?

Identifying cancer in children is difficult as symptoms can be the same as for many childhood illnesses, viruses and conditions. Children generally recover quite quickly from illnesses so it may be that a child simply does not get better as quickly as they should and this needs investigating.

Some general common symptoms are:

- Feeling very tired and exhausted all of the time and/or noticeable skin paleness
- Having lots of infections (such as ear, throat or chest) that don't go away or keep coming back
- Having flu-like symptoms that don't go away (such as lethargy, high temperature, being sick)
- Unexplained or excessive bleeding such as in urine, poo or when being sick
- Bruising easily or a rash of small red spots on the skin (called 'petechiae')
- Persistent and unexplained sweating or fever especially at night
- Aches and pains that don't go away, especially in the bones, joints, back or legs, and may be worse at night
- Unexplained new limp or leg weakness
- Changes when going for a poo such as constipation, diarrhoea, pain or feeling of not having finished
- Feeling a lump, swelling or unusual firmness anywhere on the body, especially in the abdomen, neck, chest, pelvis or armpits
- Losing a significant and unexplained amount of weight in teenagers
- Slow growth in children
- Change in behaviour such as persistent crying and screaming in young children, sleeping a lot, being off food

Brain tumours can be particularly hard to diagnose and can cause a number of different symptoms including persistent headaches, dizziness, seizures, clumsiness and being sick when waking up in the morning. A routine eye test by an optician can sometimes detect warning signs of pressure build-up at the back of the eye as a result of a brain tumour. If you are worried that your child has a brain tumour, read [HeadSmart's list of possible symptoms affecting different age groups](#).

Eye cancer (known as retinoblastoma) usually affects young children under the age of six years old with symptoms such as a white glow in the eye (usually seen in photos) or other eye changes. If you are worried that your child has retinoblastoma, [read CHECT's list of symptoms for further information](#).

## What do I do if I think my child has cancer?

Most parents report having a gut feeling or instinct that something wasn't right with their child so it is important that your concerns are listened to. This is why parental concern is now listed as a high priority for GPs to consider when referring a child or young person to hospital for suspected cancer.

If you are worried about your child, make an urgent appointment to see your GP. Make a list of your child's symptoms, when they started, whether they are getting worse and why you suspect it might be cancer. Your GP will then talk through your concerns with you and make a clinical judgement as to the next step forward.

Your child will either be referred to your local hospital for tests to find the cause of the symptoms (this may happen immediately or within 48 hours) or you will be advised to bring your child back to see the GP again if symptoms persist. Your child will then be referred if the problem doesn't go away over time or gets worse.

**You know your child best. If you still have concerns or are worried about your child in any way, revisit your GP to see whether a referral is needed.** If your child becomes very ill at any point or you become increasingly concerned, then it is advised to take them to your nearest children's A&E hospital department for urgent assessment.

## Information for parents and families

About childhood cancer, and the types of childhood cancer: <https://www.cclg.org.uk/Childhood-cancer>

[#BeAChildCancerFriend](#): a short video about how you can help parents of a child who has been diagnosed with cancer.

## Information for children and young people

'My brother or sister has cancer' – a story book for younger children, which although designed for siblings of a child who has been diagnosed with cancer, may be a useful resource to explain to other young children more about what happens when a child is diagnosed with cancer. [Link to order/download](#).

Also available as a short video animation [at this link](#).

## Information for schools

['Supporting your pupil after a cancer diagnosis'](#) – an information guide for teachers helping children and young people returning to school after a diagnosis of cancer.

Getting back to school is vital for children with cancer. School helps them to feel 'normal' and reduces the isolation and loneliness which many children with cancer face.

Teachers have a really important role to play in encouraging the child's integration back into a school routine. But cancer is a scary word for many and it is completely normal for teachers and others working at the school to feel upset – not just for the awful situation facing the pupil and their family, but also for the impact on the rest of the class and school community.

As a teacher, you may feel daunted about what to expect and worried about not having the confidence or expertise to deal with the child returning to school.

This guide aims to lessen some of the worries you may have by giving simple practical information and advice on a variety of issues faced by the child and their family, and some ideas on how to help them within a school setting.

[www.cclg.org.uk](http://www.cclg.org.uk)