

» GLOSSARY OF CANCER TYPES MOST PREVALENT IN CHILDREN

ACUTE LYMPHOBLASTIC LEUKEMIA (ACUTE LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA; ALL): A cancer of the lymphocytes, white blood cells found in the blood and lymph. In this disease, malignant, immature white blood cells continuously multiply and are overproduced in the bone marrow. This cancer causes damage and death by crowding out normal cells in the bone marrow and by spreading (metastasizing) to other organs.

ACUTE MYELOID LEUKEMIA (ACUTE MYELOGENOUS LEUKEMIA; AML): A cancer of the myeloid line of white blood cells. This disease is characterized by rapid proliferation of abnormal cells which accumulate in the bone marrow and interfere with production of normal blood cells.

BONE CANCER: Usually refers to cancers that start in the bones. Primary bone cancer (cancer that starts in the bones) is different than metastatic bone cancer (cancer that has spread to the bone). Metastatic bone cancer is named for the place from which the cancer originated. For instance, it might be described as prostate cancer that has spread (metastasized) to the bone, or breast cancer with bone metastasis. Metastatic bone cancer is more common than primary bone cancer because many types of cancer can spread to the bone. Two types of primary bone cancers occur in children:

- Ewing sarcoma – An uncommon bone cancer that occurs mostly in children and adolescents. It accounts for a little more than 1% of childhood cancers.
- Osteosarcoma – Another uncommon bone cancer, comprising a little over 2% of all new childhood cancer cases in the U.S. It often causes no pain or symptoms until swelling starts.

BRAIN CANCER: The second most common cancer in children, making up about 22% of childhood cancers. Most brain cancers in children involve the cerebellum or brain stem. Adults are more likely to develop cancers in different parts of the brain, usually the cerebral hemispheres. Because the spinal cord is part of the central nervous system, tumors of the spinal cord are grouped with those of the brain. Spinal cord tumors are less common than brain tumors in both children and adults.

GERM CELL TUMOR: Tumors of the ovary or testis that are uncommon but may be highly aggressive.

HEPATOBLASTOMA: An uncommon malignant liver neoplasm occurring in infants and children and composed of tissue resembling fetal or mature liver cells or bile ducts

LEUKEMIA: A cancer of the blood cells or the cells that become blood cells. Leukemia is the most common childhood cancer, accounting for about 30% of all childhood cancers. Acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) and acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) are the most common types of leukemia in children.

MALIGNANT MELANOMA: A cancerous tumor that begins in the cells that produce skin coloring. Melanoma is almost always curable in its early stages, but it is likely to spread, and once it has spread to other parts of the body the chances for a cure are much lower.

NEUROBLASTOMA: The most common extracranial (outside of the brain) solid tumor in children and most often diagnosed during the first year of life. This tumor can appear anywhere but usually occurs in the abdomen (belly) as a swelling. It accounts for about 7% of childhood cancers.

NON-HODGKIN LYMPHOMA AND HODGKIN'S LYMPHOMA: Cancers that start in the lymph nodes. These are sometimes called Hodgkin disease, Hodgkin's disease, or Hodgkin's lymphoma. They may spread to bone marrow and other organs. Hodgkin lymphoma can occur in both children and adults, and accounts for about 4% of childhood cancers. Hodgkin lymphoma is rare in children younger than 5 years. About 10% to 15% of cases are diagnosed in children aged 16 years or younger.

RETINOBLASTOMA: Cancer of the eye. Although relatively rare, it accounts for less than 3% of childhood cancers and about 5% of cases of childhood blindness. It usually occurs in children younger than 4 years.

RHABDOMYOSARCOMA: Tumors that originate from the cells in the embryo that develop into striated (voluntary) muscles. This tumor can occur in the head and neck, groin, trunk, arms, or legs. It is the most common soft-tissue sarcoma in children, making up about 3% of childhood cancers.

SOFT-TISSUE SARCOMA: Cancer arising from nonbone connective tissues, such as muscle, fat, nerve, or ligaments. These cancers account for about 7% of cancers diagnosed in persons younger than 20 years.

THYROID CARCINOMA: A malignant tumor of the thyroid gland. This is one of the most common carcinomas in persons younger than 20 years.

WILMS' TUMOR: A cancer that may affect one or both kidneys. It is most often found in children aged between 2 and 3 years, and it accounts for about 6% of childhood cancers.

