

RHABDOMYOSARCOMA

WHAT IS RHABDOMYOSARCOMA?

Rhabdomyosarcoma is a soft tissue sarcoma, a cancer that develops in the tissues that support and connect the body. Rhabdomyosarcoma begins in immature cells that normally form muscle. It develops in striated muscles, the muscles that people can control. The cancer may occur anywhere in the body, including in the head and neck, urinary or reproductive organs, and arms or legs. Rhabdomyosarcoma is the most common soft tissue sarcoma in children.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF RHABDOMYOSARCOMA?

Rhabdomyosarcoma is classified as either favorable or unfavorable based on the histology (what the cells look like under a microscope). The more that the cancer cells look like normal cells, the more “favorable” they are and the greater the chance treatment will be successful. Unfavorable tumors are more difficult to treat than favorable tumors and may require more intense treatment.

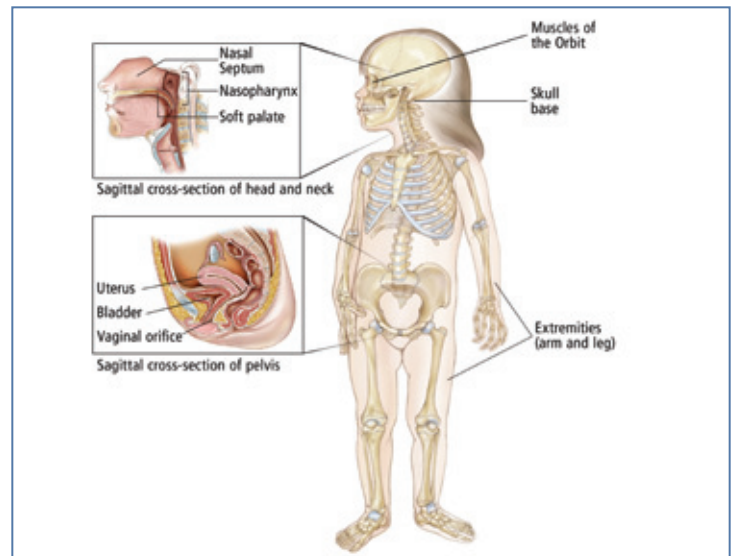


Illustration by Robert Morale/Visual Explanations, LLC. © 2004 American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DO STAGE AND GROUP MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing a cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are four stages for rhabdomyosarcoma: stages 1 through 4. The tumor is also assigned to one of four groups based on how much of the tumor can be surgically removed. More information is available at www.cancer.net/rhabdomyosarcoma.

HOW IS RHABDOMYOSARCOMA TREATED?

The treatment of rhabdomyosarcoma depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the child's overall health. All children with rhabdomyosarcoma need intravenous chemotherapy (injected into a vein), as well as surgery and/or radiation therapy. The goal of surgery is to remove the entire tumor and surrounding tissue. If the tumor cannot be completely removed or is inoperable (cannot be removed by surgery), a combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy is used. The drugs used most often are vincristine (Oncovin, Vincasar), dactinomycin (Cosmegen, Lyovac Cosmegen), and cyclophosphamide (Cytosan, Clafen, Neosar).

When making treatment decisions, consider a clinical trial; most children with cancer are treated as part of one. Talk with your child's doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of rhabdomyosarcoma treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your child's health care team.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD OR TEEN COPE WITH RHABDOMYOSARCOMA?

Helping your child or teenager understand a cancer diagnosis is a key part of the coping process. Children and adolescents with cancer should be treated at a pediatric cancer center. These centers not only provide access to the latest treatments, they offer age-appropriate programs for social and emotional needs. Encouraging your child and other family members to share their emotions can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your child's health care. Consider asking the following questions of your child's doctors:

- Can you explain my child's pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage and group is the tumor? What does this mean?
- Is the histology of the tumor favorable or unfavorable? What does this mean?
- Would you explain my child's treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to my child?
- What treatment plan do you recommend for my child? Why?
- Who is part of the treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my child's daily life? Will he or she be able to go to school and perform his or her usual activities?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my child's cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- What short-term and long-term side effects may be associated with my child's cancer treatment?



Learn more about
rhabdomyosarcoma

- What follow-up tests will my child need, and how often will he or she need them?
- Where can I find emotional support for my child? For my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/rhabdomyosarcoma.

Cancer.Net™

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

The ideas and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) or The Conquer Cancer Foundation. The information in this fact sheet is not intended as medical or legal advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a physician or other licensed health care provider. Patients with health care-related questions should call or see their physician or other health care provider promptly and should not disregard professional medical advice, or delay seeking it, because of information encountered here. The mention of any product, service, or treatment in this fact sheet should not be construed as an ASCO endorsement. ASCO is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of or related to any use of ASCO's patient education materials, or to any errors or omissions.

TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Clinical trial:

A research study that tests a new treatment or drug

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Multidisciplinary therapy:

Also called combined modality; using a combination of treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy

Pediatric oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating children and teens with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue