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Neuroblastoma - Childhood - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 04/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net?s Guide to Childhood Neuroblastoma. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread.

Neuroblastoma is a solid cancerous tumor that begins in the nerve cells outside the brain of infants and young children. It can start in the nerve tissue near the spine in the neck, chest, abdomen, or pelvis, but it most often begins in the adrenal glands. The adrenal glands are located on top of both kidneys and make hormones that help control body functions, such as heart rate and blood pressure.

Neuroblasts are immature nerve cells found in unborn babies. Normal neuroblasts mature into nerve cells or adrenal medulla cells, which are cells found in the center of the adrenal gland. Neuroblastoma forms when neuroblasts don?t mature properly.

Sometimes, babies are born with small clusters of neuroblasts that eventually mature into nerve cells and do not become cancer. A neuroblast that does not mature can continue to grow, forming a mass called a tumor.

Neuroblastoma develops most often in infants and children younger than five. It can form before the baby is born and can sometimes be found during a prenatal (before birth) ultrasound. Most often, however, neuroblastoma is found after the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, such as the lymph nodes (tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection), liver, lungs, bones, and bone marrow (the spongy, red tissue in the inner part of large bones).

Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore these related items on Cancer.Net:

- *ASCO Answers* Fact Sheet [3]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers

an easy-to-print introduction for this type of cancer.

- Cancer.Net Patient Education Video [4]: View a short video led by an ASCO expert in childhood cancer that provides basic information and areas of research.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/neuroblastoma-childhood/overview
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_neuroblastoma_childhood.pdf
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/27386