

Childhood Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma

What is non-Hodgkin lymphoma?

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL) is a disease of the lymphatic system in which lymph cells grow out of control and form a tumor. The main types of NHL are found in children: Burkitt lymphoma, large cell lymphoma, and lymphoblastic lymphoma. The types are identified by how the cells look under a microscope.

What is the function of the lymphatic system?

The lymphatic system consists of thin tubes that branch out to all parts of the body. It carries lymph, a clear fluid containing lymphocytes (white blood cells) that fight infection and disease. Lymph tissue is present in many parts of the body, so NHL can start almost anywhere and spread to any part of the body. NHL most often begins in the lymph nodes, which is found throughout the body, liver, or spleen.

What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are 4 stages for childhood NHL: stages I through IV (1 through 4). More information is available at www.cancer.net/childnhl.

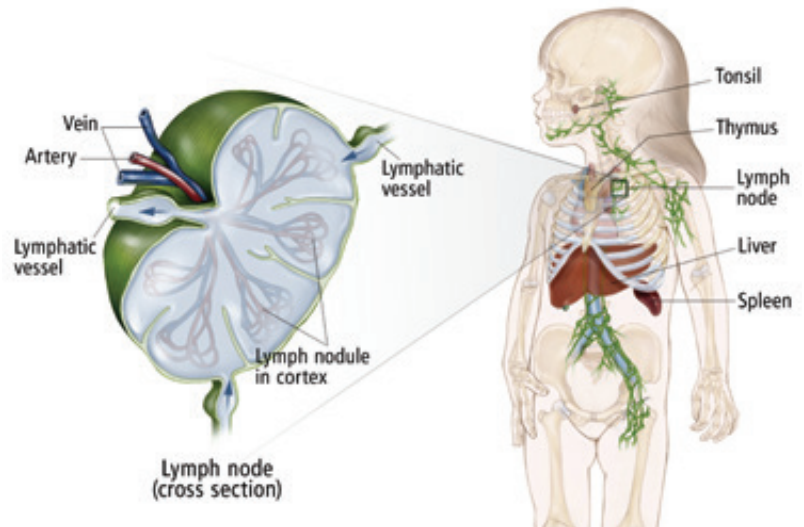
How is non-Hodgkin lymphoma treated?

The main types of treatment used for NHL in children are chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and stem cell/bone marrow transplantation. Sometimes, these treatments are used in combination. Chemotherapy is the primary treatment and can be given by mouth or injection. The type of chemotherapy used depends on the cancer's stage and the type of NHL. Radiation therapy may also be used in some cases.

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 NHL treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your child's health care team. This is called supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

How can I help my child or teen cope with non-Hodgkin lymphoma?

Helping your child or teenager understand a cancer diagnosis is a key part of the coping process. Children and adolescents with NHL should be treated at a cancer center with access to pediatric specialists. Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your child's health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your child's health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your child's health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you 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:

- What type of NHL has been diagnosed?
- What stage is the disease? What does this mean?
- Can you explain my child's pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Would you explain my child's treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to my child? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- What treatment plan do you recommend for my child? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help my child feel better, or both?
- Who will be 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?
- What short-term and long-term side effects may be associated with my child's cancer treatment?
- What follow-up tests will my child need, and how often will he or she need them?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my child's cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Where can I find emotional support for my child? For my family?
- Whom should I call with questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

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

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TERMS TO KNOW

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

Hematologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating blood disorders

Immunotherapy:

Treatment designed to boost the body's natural defenses to fight the cancer

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

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

Stem cell transplant:

Procedure that replaces diseased bone marrow with healthy stem cells that create new bone marrow or provides stem cells to help the bone marrow recover after high-dose chemotherapy.

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue

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