

**KidsHealth**

**Childhood  
Cancer**



### **Information for families of children with cancer**

In New Zealand, about 150 children (birth to 14 years) are diagnosed with cancer each year. Childhood cancer is rare - of all the newly diagnosed New Zealanders with cancer, 1 percent are children. More than 80 percent of patients diagnosed with a childhood cancer are cured as the result of treatment. An estimated 1 in 900 people aged between 16 and 34 years are childhood cancer survivors.

See the KidsHealth website for more information for families.

[kidshealth.org.nz/childhood-cancer](http://kidshealth.org.nz/childhood-cancer)

### **What is cancer?**

If your child has had a recent diagnosis of cancer, you'll probably want answers to some general questions - about how cancer develops, how it is treated and what terms like 'remission' actually mean.

See the KidsHealth website for answers to some of these questions.

[kidshealth.org.nz/what-cancer](http://kidshealth.org.nz/what-cancer)

### **Children's cancer services in New Zealand**

Child cancer care is coordinated across New Zealand. That means all children get the best available treatment wherever they live.

See the KidsHealth website for information about childhood cancer care in New Zealand.

[kidshealth.org.nz/child-cancer-services-nz](http://kidshealth.org.nz/child-cancer-services-nz)

### **Important contacts for your child with cancer**

Keep a record of the people you may need to contact about your child's cancer care. This will include your child's treatment team, your local hospital as well as any other contacts you may need.

See the KidsHealth website for some pages you can print and fill out with important contacts.

[kidshealth.org.nz/important-cancer-contacts](http://kidshealth.org.nz/important-cancer-contacts) and [kidshealth.org.nz/quick-help-guide](http://kidshealth.org.nz/quick-help-guide)

### **Tests and procedures to diagnose cancer**

Your child will need to have some tests if your doctor thinks they may have cancer. Your child's main cancer doctor is called their oncologist. They will arrange tests to find out if there are cancer cells in your child's body. Not all children have all the tests or procedures. Your child may have some of the tests again during treatment.

See the KidsHealth website for information about the tests your child might have.

[kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-tests](http://kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-tests)

### **Treatments**

There are 3 main types of treatment for cancer in children: chemotherapy, surgery and radiation therapy. Once your child's cancer doctor establishes what kind of cancer your child has, they will decide the type of treatment that your child needs and discuss this with you. The doctors will base their decisions on research findings on the most effective treatment for your child's particular type of cancer. Your child may receive 1 or a combination of the 3 main types of treatment at different times in their therapy.

See the KidsHealth website for information about the different types of cancer treatments.

[kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-treatments](http://kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-treatments)

### **Nutrition**

All children need to eat well to stay healthy and to grow well. Eating well means eating the right balance of a wide variety of foods. For children who have cancer, eating well is especially important. When your child is ill, you may need to adjust their nutritional needs such as their calorie intake. Your child's dietitian will give you advice about this. You should always contact your dietitian if your child has any eating problems.

See the KidsHealth website for information about nutrition and childhood cancer.

[kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-nutrition](http://kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-nutrition)

### **Infections during cancer treatment**

Hygiene is very important during your child's cancer treatment. Keeping your hands clean is one of the best ways to keep from getting sick and spreading illnesses. If your child has diarrhoea during their cancer treatment, tell your child's doctor or nurse.

Measles and chickenpox are dangerous for a child with low infection-fighting ability (low immunity). Talk to relatives, friends and the teachers at your child's school or preschool.

They need to know to tell you if anyone your child has been in contact with has chickenpox, measles or shingles.

See the KidsHealth website for information about infections during cancer treatment.

[kidshealth.org.nz/infections-during-cancer-treatment](http://kidshealth.org.nz/infections-during-cancer-treatment)

### **Coping with cancer treatment and hospital**

There are a range of techniques you can use to help your child cope with their cancer treatment. Distraction, participation, de-sensitisation, guided imagery, self-instruction and relaxation can all help your child to cope with their treatment. In hospital, play can help your child to express their feelings and worries, understand what is happening and cope with treatment. You and your child will benefit from being well prepared before

treatment. Ask as many questions as you need to get a clear understanding of what is going to happen and why.

See the KidsHealth website for information about coping with cancer treatment and hospital.

[kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-treatment-hospital](http://kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-treatment-hospital)

### **Support available**

If your child has had a cancer diagnosis, you and your family should know that you are not alone. Support is available. A child's cancer diagnosis can be physically and emotionally taxing for you and the whole family. You may find yourselves in situations ranging from turmoil to crisis. The hospital social worker can help organise emotional and practical support for you and your family. There are also a range of practical, emotional, cultural, community and spiritual support options available to you.

See the KidsHealth website for more information about what support options are available.

[kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-support](http://kidshealth.org.nz/cancer-support)

### **Your child's education**

News of a cancer diagnosis can travel fast within a community. It is a good idea to keep your child's preschool or school up to date with accurate information as soon as possible. Keeping communication channels open and maintaining regular contact throughout your child's treatment will help reduce uncertainty and ensure everyone is on the same page. How much or how little you and your family/whānau want shared within the school community is up to you. If your child usually goes to school and is in hospital for more than 2 weeks, a teacher from one of the regional health schools can teach them. Regional health school teachers work with students from years 0-13 with high health needs both in hospital and in the community.

See the KidsHealth website for more information about education during your child's cancer treatment.

[kidshealth.org.nz/education-cancer](http://kidshealth.org.nz/education-cancer)

### **Going home from hospital**

When your child is getting ready to go home from hospital, feelings of excitement can be mixed with feelings of anxiety for everyone in the family. Going home for the first time after diagnosis can be an especially stressful time because the situation is new. After your child goes home, help is available from support groups like the Child Cancer Foundation and the nursing and medical staff at your local and tertiary hospitals. If your family lives in the tertiary treatment centre area, the healthcare team where your child was a patient will continue providing your child's continuing care. If your family does not live in the tertiary treatment centre area, the local hospital staff and the healthcare team at the tertiary centre will share your child's continuing care.

See the KidsHealth website for more information on going home from hospital.

[kidshealth.org.nz/going-home](http://kidshealth.org.nz/going-home)

**Long-term follow-up**

About 2-5 years after cancer treatment has finished, your child or young person will transfer into long-term follow-up care. This has more focus on long-term problems that may be the result of the disease or treatment. Remember, many young people do not develop any long-term problems.

See the KidsHealth website for information about long-term follow-up care.

[kidshealth.org.nz/long-term](http://kidshealth.org.nz/long-term)