

WARNING SIGNS FOR CANCER IN CHILDREN

Cancer in children is fairly rare, but is often curable. It is important to make an early diagnosis. For this a high index of suspicion is necessary. The commonest types of cancer in childhood are leukaemia, lymphomas and tumours in the brain or abdomen.

Suspect cancer in a child with any of the following features:

- 1) **Pallor plus bleeding** (such as **purpura**, unexplained bruises or persistent oozing from mouth or nose)

- 2) **Bone pain**
 - this is not localised to specific area and often wakes the child at night
 - a child may develop a limp, or a toddler may become reluctant to bear weight or stop walking
 - always investigate backache in a child

- 3) Localised **lymphadenopathy**, when persistent and unexplained
Beware of:
 - axillary/inguinal/cervical glands which are >2 cms, discrete and non-tender, and do not get smaller after 2 week's treatment with antibiotics
 - "tuberculous" nodes not responding to treatment in 6 weeks
Biopsy these nodes.
 - glands in supraclavicular area

- 4) Unexplained **neurological signs**
These include:
 - headaches lasting longer than 2 weeks
 - early morning vomiting
 - ataxia (walks unsteadily)
 - cranial nerve palsy

5) **An unexplained mass**

- important sites are: abdomen, testes, head, neck and limbs

If a young child with abdominal distension is uncooperative, examine under sedation, to be sure that a mass is not present.

6) Persistent unexplained **fever, apathy or weight loss**

First exclude:

- urinary tract infection
- TB
- HIV

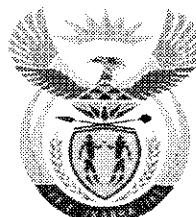
Then consider malignancy

7) **Eye changes**

- white reflex (white spot on the eye)
- recent onset of squint
- proptosis (forward displacement of the eyeball, bulging eyeball)
- loss of vision

Refer children with these eye changes urgently to an Ophthalmologist

This list was compiled by the South African Children's Cancer Study Group



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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