About 5,000 to 6,000 adolescents (teenagers ages 15 to 19) are diagnosed with cancer each year in the US. About 500 to 600 adolescents die from cancer each year, making cancer the fourth-leading cause of death in this age group after accidents, suicide, and homicide.

The chance of getting cancer is about equal for teen boys and girls, but cancer survival rates are slightly higher in girls than in boys. This is likely because of the different types of cancers that happen in males and females.

Types of Cancers That Develop in Adolescents

The types of cancer seen most often in adolescents include:
- Lymphoma (including both Hodgkin and non-Hodgkin)
- Acute leukemias
- Thyroid cancer
- Brain and spinal cord tumors
- Testicular cancer
- Sarcoma (bone or soft tissue cancer)
- Melanoma (skin cancer)
- Ovarian cancer

Prevention

Lifestyle and environmental risk factors are not thought to play much of a role in cancers in teens. But there are some things that teenagers can do to help lower their risk of getting certain kinds of cancer, such as:
- Not smoking
- Limiting time spent in the sun, and avoiding tanning salons
- Limiting the number of sex partners, and using safe sex practices. This can lower the risk of some types of cancer that may be caused by viruses, such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
- Getting vaccines against infections that increase the risk of certain types of cancer, such as the HPV vaccine and the hepatitis B (HBV) vaccine

Signs and Symptoms of Cancer in Adolescents

The early symptoms of cancer might not be caught since they can be similar to those caused by common illnesses or injuries.

It’s important for adolescents to have regular checkups and get checked if any signs or symptoms don’t go away. This might include:
- A lump or swelling in the neck, belly, testicle, or elsewhere
- Unexplained tiredness, paleness, or loss of energy
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Ongoing limping or pain in one part of the body
- A fever or illness that doesn’t go away
- Frequent headaches, often with vomiting
- Sudden eye or vision changes
- Fast, extreme weight loss
- A new mole or other spot on the skin, or one that changes in size, shape, or color
Treating Adolescents With Cancer

Treatment for adolescents with cancer is based on the type and stage of the cancer. Adolescents may get treated in a childhood or adult cancer setting based on their cancer type and what they would rather do.

The main types of treatment used for cancer in teens are surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy (chemo), targeted therapy, immunotherapy, stem cell transplant, and clinical trials. Sometimes, more than one type of treatment is used.

When a teen needs cancer treatment, the cancer care team can help with many issues, such as treatment effects on fertility, education or employment needs, health insurance concerns, and financial issues.

Late and Long-term Effects of Cancer Treatment on Adolescents

Some adolescents who have been treated for cancer might have effects that continue after treatment ends (long-term effects). They might also have effects that show up many years later (known as late effects).

Long-term or late effects might include:

- Trouble having children (decreased fertility)
- A higher risk of getting another cancer later in life
- Heart or lung problems (from certain chemo drugs or radiation to the chest)
- Hearing or vision problems (from certain chemo drugs or radiation to the head)
- Problems with organs, such as the kidneys or bones
- Pain or swelling in parts of the body
- Hormone deficiencies

Visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/cancer/cancer-in-adolescents or call us at 1-800-227-2345 to learn more. We’re here when you need us.