

Hodgkin's Disease for the Pediatric Patient

What is Hodgkin's disease?

Hodgkin's disease is a cancer that develops in the lymphatic system, part of the body's immune system. Cancers involving lymphoid tissue are called lymphomas. Because there is lymph tissue in many parts of the body (including the neck, armpits, chest, abdomen, and groin), Hodgkin's disease can start in almost any part of the body and spread to almost any organ or tissue, including the liver, bone marrow, and spleen.

Hodgkin's disease is rare in children under 5 years of age. Hodgkin's disease is most common in people between 15 and 35 years old and is more common in boys than girls. The exact cause of Hodgkin's disease is unknown, but there is an increased incidence in children who have immunologic disorders.

What are the symptoms of Hodgkin's disease?

Symptoms of Hodgkin's disease may include painless swelling of the lymph nodes (often in the neck), fever, night sweats, weight loss, weakness, fatigue, and itching. A cough and respiratory symptoms are common with chest involvement. Enlargement of the liver and spleen may also occur.

How is Hodgkin's disease diagnosed and treated?

If a lymph node doesn't feel normal when examined by a doctor, the doctor may need to obtain a biopsy of the lymph node. If Hodgkin's disease is found, more tests will be done to find out if the cancer has spread from where it started to other parts of the body. This is called staging. It is important to know the stage of the disease to plan treatment.

The tests that may be done to determine the stage of disease include x-rays, CT scans of the chest and abdomen, ultrasound scans, and lymphangiograms.

The most common treatments for Hodgkin's disease are chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy, but treatment may be different depending on the stage of the cancer and whether the child has reached full growth.