

The pediatric hematology oncology program

at Hasbro Children's Hospital offers the highest quality, patient-centered care and state-of-the-art treatments for hematology and oncology patients. We provide services for children, adolescents and college-age youth at every phase of illness and recovery, from evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment to survivorship care. Our multidisciplinary team – doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, nutritionists, pharmacists, physical/occupational therapists, child life specialists – heals by focusing on each child, while guiding each family through the emotional stress of illness.



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Radiation Therapy

Hasbro Children's Hospital

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LSMC 0815

RADIATION THERAPY FOR CHILDREN



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HOW DOES RADIATION THERAPY FOR CHILDREN DIFFER FROM ADULT CARE?

The actual therapy used to treat children and adults is similar, but children receive lower doses of radiation and require fewer treatment sessions. In general, pediatric cancers are more curable than adult cancers. Some of the cancers that develop in children are rarely seen in older individuals, and the tumor sites in children are significantly different from those in adults. Many pediatric cancer patients also receive chemotherapy during radiation therapy.

Pediatric patients benefit from a clinical team that has expertise in all types of pediatric cancers and understands the unique needs of children and adolescents, as well as their families.

WHAT ARE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS TO RADIATION THERAPY FOR CHILDREN?

The purpose of radiation therapy is to destroy cancer cells, but radiation can also damage healthy cells. It's this damage that can cause side effects, mostly in the area of the body being treated. The physical side effects depend on the dose of radiation, treatment site and whether the child is receiving internal or external radiation. Many patients show no side effects. For those who do experience side effects, they are generally short-term and not serious. The most common side effects are fatigue, skin damage or changes in the skin, hair loss, sore mouth and tooth decay, gastrointestinal problems, and the lowering of platelets, white blood cells and red blood cells.

Some children do experience long-term or chronic side effects that can occur months to years later. These late effects include problems with fertility, bone growth, changes to the skin or a new tumor. Radiation used to treat brain cancer can impact learning and memory.

WILL MY CHILD BE SEDATED DURING TREATMENT?

Only pediatric cancer patients under the age of five usually require sedation during radiation therapy. Even with these patients, our team works with the child and their family to limit the use of sedation following the first or second treatment, as both the child and parents become more familiar with the treatment routine. For really young patients who do require sedation for the entire course of radiation therapy, they are treated early in the morning, typically at 8 a.m., because the sedation medication requires that the child not eat from midnight and until the treatment is completed. Patients usually wake up and are alert from sedation within 30 minutes following treatment.

WILL I BE ABLE TO SEE AND COMMUNICATE WITH MY CHILD DURING TREATMENT?

Yes. All parents can see their child on closed-circuit TV during treatments. For young patients not requiring sedation, a parent can read a favorite story to them using an intercom system just outside the treatment room. Patients can listen to their favorite music during treatment as well.

WILL MY CHILD NEED TO STAY OVERNIGHT OR MISS SCHOOL?

Radiation therapy is usually done as an outpatient procedure. For school-age children, we try to schedule the radiation therapy sessions – lasting between 15 to 30 minutes – so that they minimize time away from school. Some pediatric cancer patients receive home schooling organized by their local school and teachers. Lessons can also be provided by a Hasbro Children's Hospital teacher, if needed.

WHOM DO I CALL AFTERHOURS IF MY CHILD HAS A BAD REACTION TO TREATMENT?

Families are provided with a phone number that they can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week with any questions or concerns.

WHAT OTHER SERVICES ARE PROVIDED TO PATIENTS AND FAMILIES?

While the department of radiation oncology is physically located in the adult Comprehensive Cancer Center at Rhode Island Hospital, comprehensive pediatric services are provided at Hasbro Children's Hospital. These services include physical, nutritional and emotional support for the patient and their extended families, including parents, siblings, grandparents and friends. In addition, the department of radiology is linked with the support services of The Tomorrow Fund Clinic staff at Hasbro Children's Hospital.