

# Hepatoblastoma



Hepatoblastoma is a solid tumour cancer that develops in the soft tissue of the liver and accounts for almost half of liver cancers in children.

The liver is situated in the upper part of the abdomen and is the largest organ in the body. The liver is very important as it performs vital bodily functions such as producing proteins that circulate in the blood. Some of these proteins are essential for maintaining the balance of bodily fluids and others help the blood clot and prevent excessive bleeding. The liver also breaks down waste products not used by the body and destroys harmful substances.

## ***Types of Childhood Liver Cancer include:***

- 🦿 **Hepatoblastoma:** This type of liver cancer does not usually spread outside the liver. It generally occurs in children younger than 3 years of age and affects slightly more boys than girls.
- 🦿 **Hepatocellular Carcinoma:** This liver cancer often spreads to other areas of the body. It mostly affects older children and teenagers

Hepatoblastoma is a primary liver cancer, which means that it starts in the liver.

## **Causes of Hepatoblastoma**

Although a lot of research has been done into the causes of Hepatoblastoma, as with most childhood cancers nobody has been able to determine what causes it.

Children with genetic conditions such as Aicardi Syndrome, Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP), Hemihyperplasia, or Beckwith-Wiedemann Syndrome carry an increased risk of being diagnosed with Hepatoblastoma.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

### ***Some of the typical signs and symptoms of Hepatoblastoma are:***

- 🦿 Feeling nauseous or vomiting for no reason
- 🦿 A painless lump in the abdomen

- ⚠ Swelling or pain in the abdomen
- ⚠ Loss of appetite or unusual weight loss

Some of the above could also be a sign of a medical condition other than cancer, so please consult your doctor if your child exhibits any of these symptoms.

## Tests and Diagnosis

***Hepatoblastoma can be diagnosed or staged using the following tests and procedures:***

- ⚠ **Physical Exam and History:** The doctor will perform a physical examination, checking your child's general health as well as checking for anything unusual or signs of cancer, and a complete medical history will be taken
- ⚠ **Liver Function Tests:** A blood sample is checked to determine the quantities of various substances released into the blood by the liver. A higher than normal quantity of any component could be a sign of liver cancer
- ⚠ **Serum Tumour Marker Test:** This procedure checks the quantities of various substances released into the blood by tissues, organs or tumour cells. Increased amounts of a protein called alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) or a hormone called beta-human chorionic gonadotropin could indicate that a liver cancer is present
- ⚠ **Liver Function Tests:** This is a procedure where a blood sample is taken and checked to measure the amount of certain substances released by the liver into the bloodstream. A higher than normal level could indicate liver cancer
- ⚠ **A Biopsy:** Doctors perform a biopsy under general anaesthetic to remove cells and tissues to be studied under a microscope by a pathologist; various laboratory tests are also done.

Other tests that may be done include x-rays, CT scan (CAT scan), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), an ultrasound, a complete blood count (CBC), or blood chemistry studies.

## Treatment options

Treatment for hepatoblastoma will depend on the staging or pretext of the tumour and whether the tumour has spread to other parts of the body or not. Pretext 1, 2 and 3 tumours are 'standard risk'; Pretext 4 is 'high risk' and includes tumours that have spread to other parts of the body. Treatment for all Pretext stages is basically very similar.

***Treatment options consist of:***

- ⚠ **Chemotherapy:** The use of a combination of anti-cancer drugs to destroy or shrink cancer cells is the preferred treatment, and will be the first treatment given.

⚠ **Surgery:** Surgery may be done a few weeks after the chemotherapy has finished removing any remaining tumour. Chemotherapy may be given again after surgery

Some of the treatment options may result in after-effects such as nausea, vomiting, hair loss, increased risk of infection, fatigue, bruising and bleeding or diarrhoea. The doctor should explain all of this to you, but if they do not, please ask them about side effects.

## **Awareness Ribbon Colour**

The awareness ribbon colour for Hepatoblastoma is Dark Green

*This article was written on behalf of [Little Fighters Cancer Trust](#) by Billi du Preez of [Red Feather Scribes](#). Please feel free to share the article, but please respect copyright by sharing the article in its entirety, as is, including this paragraph with links at the bottom of the article. Thank You!*