

# Rhabdomyosarcoma – the basics

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This information sheet will tell you in simple terms:

- What is a Rhabdomyosarcoma?
- Why did the Rhabdomyosarcoma happen?
- What problems does a Rhabdomyosarcoma cause?
- How did we find the Rhabdomyosarcoma?
- How do we treat Rhabdomyosarcoma?

## What is a Rhabdomyosarcoma?

A **Rhabdomyosarcoma** is a type of cancer - a lump of cells (tumour) which should not be there. Rhabdomyosarcoma is a cancer that starts from muscle cells. The Rhabdomyosarcoma can start in any place in the body. There are several types of rhabdomyosarcoma which are named after how they look under a microscope.

My child's Rhabdomyosarcoma is called a \_\_\_\_\_.

## Why did the Rhabdomyosarcoma happen?

In most cases, we do not know why children get a Rhabdomyosarcoma. Some people with rare genetic conditions are at higher risk of getting a rhabdomyosarcoma.

## What problems do Rhabdomyosarcomas cause?

With a Rhabdomyosarcoma, the problems depend on where the cancer is. In most cases there is a lump or swelling which can be seen or felt. Sometimes the cancer lump presses on nerves or on other parts of the body. Sometimes, the lump causes pain. Rhabdomyosarcoma cancer cells may spread to other areas of the body and cause problems there.

## How did we find the Rhabdomyosarcoma?

You or your doctor may have noticed a lump, or been concerned about pains that do not go away. Usually a scan or an X-ray shows that there is a lump which should not be there.

## How do we treat Rhabdomyosarcoma?

The treatment of each person with a Rhabdomyosarcoma is different. In most cases, a paediatric oncologist (a doctor who treats children with cancer) will develop the best treatment for your child, together with other specialists. These may be:

- a **paediatric surgeon** (a surgeon who operates on children)
- a **radiation oncologist** (a doctor who uses radiation therapy to treat cancer).

Your oncologist is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your surgeon is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your radiation oncologist is: \_\_\_\_\_

## What happens in the first days?

In the first days, many **scans** will be done to find exactly **where** the cancer is, usually a CAT scan and a MRI scan. Some nuclear medicine scans (bone scan, gallium scan) and some **blood tests** will also be done. These tests allow us to find exactly where the Rhabdomyosarcoma is, and whether it has spread to other areas in the body.

A small amount of **bone marrow** (the liquid part inside bones) will be tested for Rhabdomyosarcoma cells. A surgeon will perform an operation (a **biopsy**) to take out a small piece of the Rhabdomyosarcoma so that the exact type of the cancer is known. This helps in planning the best treatment.

There are three main ways to treat Rhabdomyosarcoma cancers. These are:

- use of drugs which kill cancer cells (**chemotherapy**)
- removal of some or all of the lump with an **operation**
- use of radiation to kill the cancer cells (**radiotherapy**).

Depending on the type of tumour and where it is, some or all of these ways will be used to treat the cancer. Some tumours have spread and can not be removed with an operation alone. Some tumours are not suitable for radiotherapy.

Your specialists will talk to you about the best way to treat **your** child.

Any questions about this information may be directed to the Oncology Treatment Centre on 9845 2115 (8am-4pm) or Camperdown ward on 9845 1123. Further sheets are available from the Oncology staff or The Children's Hospital at Westmead's website at [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au). Updated **April 2003**.

**the children's hospital at Westmead**