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Burkitt lymphoma

Burkitt lymphoma (BL) is a very fast growing form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Causes

BL was first discovered in children in certain parts of Africa. It also occurs in the United States.

The African type of BL is closely associated with the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), the main cause of infectious mononucleosis. The North American form of BL is not commonly linked to EBV.

People with HIV/AIDS have an increased risk for this condition. BL is most often seen in males.

Symptoms

BL may first be noticed as a swelling of the lymph nodes (glands) in the head and neck. These swollen lymph nodes are often painless, but can grow very rapidly.

In the types commonly seen in the United States, the cancer often starts in the belly area (abdomen). The disease can also start in the ovaries, testes, brain, kidneys, liver, and spinal fluid.

Other general symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will perform a physical exam. Tests that may be done include:

- Bone marrow biopsy
- Chest x-ray
- CT scan of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis
- Complete blood count (CBC)
- Examination of the spinal fluid
- Lymph node biopsy

- MRI of the abdomen or other affected body area
- PET scan

Treatment

Chemotherapy is used to treat this type of cancer. If the cancer does not respond to chemotherapy alone, a bone marrow transplant may be done.

Outlook (Prognosis)

More than one half of people with BL can be cured with intensive chemotherapy. The cure rate may be lower if the cancer spreads to the bone marrow or spinal fluid. The outlook is poor if the cancer comes back after a remission or does not go into remission as a result of the first cycle of chemotherapy.

Possible Complications

Possible complications of BL include:

- Complications of treatment
- Spread of the cancer

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if you have symptoms of BL.

Alternative Names

B-cell lymphoma; High-grade B-cell lymphoma; Small noncleaved cell lymphoma; Burkitt's lymphoma

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