

Let's talk about...

U.S. News
"Best Children's
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pediatric specialties



Explaining Leukemia to Children

What is Cancer?

- The body is made up of millions of tiny cells and is always growing new healthy cells. There are many kinds of cells in the body, like brain cells, skin cells, and hair cells. And the blood also contains cells, which flow through the body doing important things.
- When the body has cancer, it is because of unhealthy cells. These unhealthy cells grow much faster than healthy cells.

What is leukemia?

- Blood cancer is called **leukemia**. Blood cells are made inside bones by something called **bone marrow**. The marrow is like a blood factory in the center of the bone.
- A person with leukemia has something wrong with that blood factory. The bone marrow is making unhealthy cells. It makes so many unhealthy cells that there is less room for the healthy cells.
- **Red blood cells** carry oxygen to all parts of the body to give the body energy.
- **White blood cells** fight germs.
- **Platelets** help stop bleeding (like a scab after a cut).
- **Plasma** is the liquid the cells float in so they can flow through the body easy.



Normal blood



Leukemia

Discuss the "3 C's of Cancer"

- The illness is called **Cancer**, it is not **Contagious**, and it is not **Caused** by anything the child or parent/caregiver did or did not do.
- This helps children give a name to the illness, and to realize it is different from any other illness they might see (at school or home) like the cold or the flu, and that siblings, friends, and other people cannot get cancer from them, and they did not cause it.
- You can talk to, play with, and hug someone with leukemia, as long as you have not been sick and you have clean hands.

Treatment

- **Chemotherapy** (or "**chemo**") is a medicine that goes into the body and helps fight the cancer cells. Sometimes chemo can hurt some of the good cells too, like hair cells. When the chemo is working, it can make the person tired, sick, sad, or frustrated.
- **Radiation** is an invisible laser that helps fight the tumor. It goes through the skin to help get rid of tumor cells. The light does not hurt or feel like anything. But after the treatment, the person may be tired or feel sick to their stomach, and their skin might feel sore to touch.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>