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Burkitt lymphoma

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Burkitt lymphoma is a very fast growing form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Causes

Burkitt lymphoma was first discovered in children in certain parts of Africa, but it also occurs in the United States.

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

People with HIV have an increased risk for this condition. Burkitt lymphoma is most often seen in males.

Symptoms

Burkitt lymphoma may first be noticed as a swelling of the lymph nodes (glands) in the neck, groin, or under the arm. These swollen lymph nodes are often painless, but can grow very rapidly.

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

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Night sweats
- Unexplained swollen lymph nodes
- Unexplained weight loss

Exams and Tests

- 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
- PET scan

Treatment

Chemotherapy is used to treat this type of cancer. Commonly used medicines include prednisone, cyclophosphamide, ifosfamide, vincristine, cytarabine, doxorubicin, methotrexate, and etoposide.

Outlook (Prognosis)

More than half of those with Burkitt lymphoma 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.

Possible Complications

- Complications of treatment (radiation therapy or chemotherapy)
- Spread of the cancer

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call your health care provider if you have symptoms of Burkitt lymphoma.

Alternative Names

B-cell lymphoma; High-grade B-cell lymphoma

References

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