Children and Young People with Cancer in Scotland

About this release

This release by Public Health Scotland (PHS) provides information on cancer in children (ages 0-14) and young people (ages 15-24) in Scotland, using age-appropriate cancer classifications.

Main Points

- Each year in Scotland around 330 children and young people (CYP) under 25 years are diagnosed with cancer; almost one person every day. The numbers of new cases per year is similar to the rest of the world and have remained fairly stable over the last decade.
- In the ten year period 2009-2018, 1,298 children (aged 0-14, 53% male) were diagnosed with cancer and 1,996 young people (aged 15-24, 51% female) were diagnosed with cancer.
- Cancer occurrence in children and young people varies by age and sex.
- Nearly one third (31%) of childhood cancers were leukaemia and just over a quarter (27%) were cancers of the brain and central nervous system (CNS).
- The most common diagnoses in young people were lymphomas (19%), and melanomas and skin cancers (14%), while, collectively, carcinomas accounted for 22% of all cancers in this age group.

Children aged 0-14: Number of newly diagnosed cases of cancer by age and selected Diagnostic Groupings, Scotland, 2009-2018.

- The types of cancers seen in children and young people are different from those seen in adults and are generally more treatable.
• Very few children (6%) and young people (3%) die within the first year after a cancer diagnosis.

• Most children and young people will be cured of their cancer. 88% of children diagnosed with cancer, and 92% of young people diagnosed with cancer can expect to be alive more than five years after the diagnosis. However, some cancers are harder to treat than others and more must be done for these patients. Collaborative working with palliative care services is essential.

• Cancer is the commonest cause of disease-related death in children and young people. In Scotland, around 40 CYP die from cancer every year. Similar proportions of CYP died in hospital (46%) or at home/ a private address (40%), while one in seven (14%) died in a hospice.

• For children diagnosed with cancer (aged 0-14) between 1999 and 2018, 2,034 of them were still alive as at 31st December 2018. For young people diagnosed with cancer (aged 15-24) between 1999 and 2018, 2,287 of them were still alive as at 31st December 2018.

Background

The occurrence and outcomes of cancer in children and young people (CYP) in Scotland deserves particular attention. Our existing publications on cancer incidence include CYP using a classification of cancer types based on anatomical site, which is more suited to cancers diagnosed in adults. Many adult cancers are caused by modifiable lifestyle factors or are associated with increasing age. The determinants of cancers in CYP are very different. As children and young people usually live many decades after a diagnosis of cancer, the implications for their future health, including fertility, are different to those of adults diagnosed in later life.

Improving the wellbeing of children and young people after cancer treatment, and into their adulthood, has increasing major resource implications, not only on paediatric and adult cancer services, but also other fields, such as radiology, fertility and cardiology for long term follow-up. The Scottish Government Cancer Plan for Children and Young People 2020-25 will address all of these issues (due for publication at end of 2020).

This publication has been developed in collaboration with the Managed Service Network for Children and Young People with Cancer. Information is included on cancer incidence, survival, mortality, place of death and prevalence covering the years 2009-2018.

Contact

Mor Kandlik Eltanani
Senior Information Analyst
Phone: 0131 275 6644
Email: mor.kandlikeltanani@nhs.net

David Morrison
Consultant in Public Health Medicine
Phone: 0131 275 6087
Email: david.morrison@nhs.net

For all media enquiries please email phs.comms@nhs.net or call 07500 854 574.

Further Information

Data from this publication are available from the publication page on our website.

The next release of this publication will be July 2021.

PHS and Official Statistics

Public Health Scotland (PHS) is the principal and authoritative source of statistics on health and care services in Scotland. PHS is designated by legislation as a producer of ‘Official Statistics’. Our official statistics publications are produced to a high professional standard and comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Further information about our statistics.