Minnesota Department of
Education

Leukemia Information Sheet

Leukemia is a type of cancer that affects the blood and bone marrow. The marrow is the spongy center of bones where blood cells form. The disease develops when blood cells produced in the bone marrow grow out of control. From there it can move to other organs, including the lymph nodes, spleen, liver and brain. The major types of leukemia that occur in children are acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), acute myeloid leukemia (AML), myelodysplastic syndromes, chronic myeloid leukemia and juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia.

Symptoms

Leukemia symptoms include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Anemia
- Easy bruising
- Recurring infections
- Bone and joint pain
- Abdominal pain
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Difficulty breathing

It is important to remember that many of these symptoms have other causes as well, and are not necessarily due to leukemia.

Treatment

Treatment usually begins with addressing the signs and symptoms, such as anemia, bleeding and/or infection. Treatment may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, intrathecal medications (medications inserted through a needle into the fluid-filled space around the spinal cord), blood and marrow transplants, high doses of hormones or other proteins, blood transfusions and antibiotics.

Educational Implications

Students with leukemia often miss 10-20 weeks of school in one year due to hospitalizations, treatments, side effects and infections.

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Some students may have difficulty keeping up with the curriculum and may experience frustration, anxiety, apathy and depression.

The illness and treatments may affect attention, memory, nonverbal skills, language skills, motor skills and energy levels.

The more the cancer affects the student's social interactions, the more general psychosocial adaptation may be affected.

Educational Options

Those students whose leukemia adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.

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