CHILDHOOD CANCER IN THE AMERICAS

KEY MESSAGES

1 CHILDHOOD CANCER IS DEVASTATING TO INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY

- Leukemias and brain and central nervous system cancers are the most common types of childhood cancers. Leukemia accounts for about 1/3 of cases and acute lymphoblastic leukemia is the most common leukemia. Brain tumors, gliomas and medulloblastomas, are the next common type of childhood cancer, with other solid tumors such as neuroblastomas, Wilms tumors, and sarcomas such as rhabdomyosarcoma and osteosarcoma, being less common.
- Cancer in children is rare, yet, each year in the Americas more than 27,000 children under 14 years of age are diagnosed with a cancer and an estimated 10,000 children will die from the disease.
- The majority of childhood cancer cases (65%) occur in Latin America and the Caribbean, where there is an estimated 17,500 children newly diagnosed and over 8,000 children dying from the disease each year.
- The causes of childhood cancers are largely unknown, but effective treatments are available.

2 THE PROGNOSIS FOR CHILDHOOD CANCER IS POORER IN LOW RESOURCE SETTINGS

- Significant advances in treatment have led to high survival rates of childhood cancer, approaching 80%.
- However, this survival rate is significantly lower for children living in low resource settings, where approximately one in two children diagnosed with cancer will die.
- This disparity is due to health system challenges such as limited access to early detection and effective treatment and care, where childhood cancer is often detected too late and appropriate treatment is seldom available or affordable.
- One of the greatest barriers to better childhood cancer survival in Latin America and the Caribbean is abandonment of treatment, due to high cost as well as limited availability of treatment.

References: GLOBOCAN 2008. Available from: http://globocan.iarc.fr.

Pan American Health Organization
Regional Office of the World Health Organization

UNite in the fight against NCDs

3 THE EARLIER THE DIAGNOSIS, THE BETTER THE SURVIVAL

- Although the signs and symptoms depend on the type of cancer and location within the body, at least 85% of childhood cancer is associated with the following warning signs below. These signs can be detected early by trained primary health care providers:

  - Unusual abdominal mass or swelling
  - Prolonged and unexplained fever
  - Pallor, loss of energy and rapid weight loss
  - Unexplained and prolonged pain and headaches, often with vomiting
  - Easy bruises and unexplained bleeding
  - Sudden change in balance or behavior
  - Swollen head
  - White glow in the eye

KEY ACTIONS BY PAHO

- PAHO is collaborating with Member States in the Americas to raise awareness of the problem of childhood cancer and support health providers to improve survival for children with cancers. This includes working with professional associations such as the International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP) and the Central America Association of Pediatric Oncologists (AHOPCA) in developing clinical protocols and standards of care, as well as training primary health care providers in early detection.

- Within PAHO's Strategy for Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI), a training module on childhood cancers has been created for use by primary care physicians. By integrating diagnosis and treatment of childhood illnesses, prevention measures, and health promotion into a single evaluation sequence, IMCI reduces missed opportunities for early detection and treatment of childhood cancer and improving quality and efficiency at the first level of care.

To find out more about childhood cancer in the Americas and PAHO's work, visit:

www.paho.org/cancer

http://twitter.com/ncds_paho

http://www.facebook.com/PAHONCDs