Burkitt’s Lymphoma for the Pediatric Patient

Burkitt’s lymphoma is one of three types of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma is a cancer that forms in the lymph system. The lymph system is the tissues and organs that produce, store and carry white blood cells. It fights infection and disease. The lymph system includes the bone marrow, spleen and lymph nodes.

Symptoms

Symptoms typically include:
- Abdominal pain or swelling
- A change in bowel habits
- Nausea and vomiting
- Gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines) bleeding

Burkitt’s lymphoma can grow rapidly. The tumor can press on other organs, causing serious problems, including:
- Airway obstruction or difficulty breathing
- Abnormal heartbeat
- Obstruction or perforation of the bowel (preventing adequate passage of feces from the body)
- Renal tract obstruction (preventing adequate flow of urine from kidneys)
- Inferior vena cava obstruction (preventing adequate flow of blood to the heart)
- Increased intracranial pressure (build-up of fluid in the brain that can cause headaches, vision problems, nausea and/or vomiting, changes in consciousness)

Diagnosis and Treatment

In addition to blood tests, your child’s doctor may do the following:
- Chest x-ray
- Lymph node biopsy – a needle is used to remove tissue from a lymph node
- Bone scan – a special kind of camera is used to scan all the bones in the body
- Bone marrow aspiration and/or biopsy – a needle is used to remove a sample of fluid from the bone marrow (aspiration) or a sample of bone marrow cells from the bone marrow (biopsy)
- Pleural fluid analysis – using a needle to take out fluid from the sac that surrounds the lungs
- Peritoneal fluid analysis – using a needle to take out fluid from the area where such organs as the stomach, liver and intestines are located
- CT scan of the neck, chest, abdomen and pelvis
- PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scan – a scan to determine how tissues function
- Spinal tap – fluid is removed from the spine to see if cancer cells are present in the brain or spine.

Burkitt’s lymphoma is treated with high-dose cancer-killing medicines called chemotherapy.