

Pediatric Radiation Therapy

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Hearing that your child needs radiation as part of their cancer treatment can bring fear and uncertainty. There is a lot to learn when your child begins a new phase of cancer care. This handout will help answer some of the most common questions families have.

Your child will not become radioactive after receiving radiation treatment. There are no special precautions to take for dressing or for body waste (vomit, pee, poop). There is no danger to you or to those who come in contact with your child.

Radiation Therapy

Radiation Therapy is a treatment that uses special machines to stop cancer cells from growing and spreading. This can cure cancer or in some cases relieve symptoms. Radiation therapy may be given on its own or in combination with other treatments.

Your child will receive external beam radiation therapy, which is usually given as a series of treatments. They are scheduled Monday through Friday, not on weekends or holidays. Your child may have one treatment or many weeks of treatment.

The number of treatments your child will have depends on:

- the type of cancer they have.
- the goal of treatment (for example, to stop pain or to cure their cancer).

Where will my child get their radiation treatments?

The radiation cancer centre is located in the Dickson Building, at the Victoria General Site in Halifax.

What can we expect before my child starts radiation treatment?

Your child's first appointment will be their simulation markings appointment.

At this appointment, you will meet with radiation therapists who will help your child get into the treatment position. This may include making a mask and/or using a positioning cushion.

The radiation therapist will place marks on your child's skin. These marks will be used to help position your child for treatment. These small (about the size of a freckle) marks are made with permanent ink. If these permanent marks are required, a numbing cream will be applied. A radiation therapist will then take a CT scan, that is used for planning only. This scan is not a diagnostic image and no radiation treatment is given at this appointment.

Sedation

It is important that your child stay still during their simulation markings appointment and treatment. Some may require sedation. If sedation is needed, the radiation team will work closely with the IWK team so the radiation therapy and anesthesia are given safely and effectively. All sedation appointments are early in the morning as your child must have an empty stomach to be sedated safely. You and the IWK team will be with your child while they wake up and can return to the IWK.

What happens during the radiation treatments?

Radiation therapists give your child the treatment. There are at least two radiation therapists with your child each day. Your child may need to change into a hospital gown so that the radiation therapist can access the markings. The radiation therapist can discuss the length of time your child's treatments will take at your first treatment appointment.

During the treatment, your child will not see or feel the radiation. The machine will move around your child, it may come close, but it will not touch them. The radiation therapists will not be in the room during the treatment but will be able to see your child and communicate with them over an intercom. The radiation therapists working with your child will explain what is going on, step by step.

What side effects should we expect?

Side effects depend on the part of the body being treated and the dose of radiation used. The care team will give you specific advice on how to manage any side effects of your child's experiences.

How will my child's progress be monitored?

Your child's radiation oncology team will see your child regularly during treatment, usually once a week or as needed. The radiation therapists check in with your child every day at the treatment machine and will let the care team know if anything changes.

Please share any new symptoms or concerns with the team as soon as they come up. If you have a concern between visits, you can contact the family care coordinator at the IWK during clinic hours.

After treatment ends, your child will have follow-up appointments through regular visits at the IWK with members of their cancer care team.

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

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