

## Cancer Happens® Teen Education

### Common Questions from Teens

- ***If someone in my family has cancer, does it mean I will get cancer?***

Only 5% to 10% of all cancers are hereditary (passed down from your mother or father). This is a small percentage of cancers, so how can you tell whether a cancer runs in the family? Some clues include having multiple relatives with cancer on the same side of the family, especially if they were diagnosed at a younger age; or having a single person in the family with multiple tumors, especially in the same organ. The cancers that are most commonly linked to family history/inherited genes are breast, prostate, and colon. Remember, only 5-10% percent of cancers are inherited, but it is important to let your doctor know of any history.

- ***Do teens get cancer?***

Cancers in adolescents are often thought of as those that start between the ages of 15 and 19. Cancer is not common in teens, but a wide variety of cancer types can occur in this age group. The most common cancers in adolescents are: Lymphomas, Leukemias (mostly acute lymphocytic leukemia [ALL] and acute myeloid leukemia [AML]), Thyroid cancer, Brain and spinal cord tumors, Testicular cancer, Bone tumors (osteosarcoma and Ewing tumors), Soft tissue tumors (sarcomas), Melanoma, Ovarian cancer.

- ***What are common symptoms of cancer?***

You should know some of the general signs and symptoms of cancer. But remember, having any of these does not mean that you have cancer – many other things can cause these signs and symptoms. If you have any of these symptoms and they last for a long time or get worse, please see a doctor to find out what's going on. Common signs and symptoms include: unexplained weight loss, fever, fatigue, pain, and skin changes. There are also other common signs and symptoms that could suggest a specific type of cancer, such as a nagging cough or hoarseness indicating lung cancer.

- ***How is cancer diagnosed?***

A health history, physical exam, and tests, such as blood tests, imaging tests, and biopsies, can be used to help make a diagnosis. Although many tests are used to help diagnose cancer, a biopsy (the removal of cells or tissues for examination under a microscope by a pathologist) is usually needed to be certain that a person has cancer.

- ***How is cancer treated?***

The most common types of cancer treatment include surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Some less common therapies can include hormone therapy, biological therapy (also known as immunotherapy), targeted therapy, and complementary and alternative methods. The cancer treatment option(s) a doctor recommends depends on the type and stage of cancer, possible side effects, and the patient's preferences and overall health.

- ***What is vaping?***

Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol (incorrectly called vapor by the industry), which is produced by an e-cigarette or similar device. The term is used because e-cigarettes do not produce tobacco smoke, but rather an aerosol, often mistaken for water vapor, that actually consists of fine particles. Many of these particles contain varying amounts of toxic chemicals, which have been linked to cancer, as well as respiratory and heart disease.

- ***Are e-cigarettes safe?***

No. Although we may not fully understand the long-term effects of e-cigarettes, there continues to be evolving evidence about the health risks of e-cigarettes on the lungs, heart, and brain. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is especially harmful to developing teen brains; cancer-causing chemicals and other toxins that when inhaled can cause irreversible lung damage and lung disease; as well as heavy metals that are created during the heating process. Despite e-cigarette industries best efforts to convince people they are “safe” products, we know this is not true.

- ***Can marijuana cause lung cancer?***

Cannabis (marijuana) smoke and tobacco smoke contain many of the same potent carcinogens, but a critical, yet unresolved medical and public-health issue is whether cannabis smoking might facilitate the development of lung cancer. A number of studies have yielded conflicting evidence regarding the risks of various cancers associated with Cannabis use. The epidemiologic evidence of a link between marijuana use and cancer is still inconclusive. It is important to note, that cannabis is used to treat certain side effects from cancer treatment, i.e. nausea, appetite changes, and sleep disturbance. Based on the information above, oncologists might recommend other forms of cannabis such as edibles, pills, or droplets to avoid the potential harm of inhaling the smoke.

- ***Is there such thing as thirdhand smoke and/or aerosol emissions?***

There is evidence to show that thirdhand smoke and aerosol both pose health risks. Thirdhand smoke is the toxic airborne pollutant that lingers long after the smoke has cleared, also known as “residual smoke.” Have you ever walked into a hotel room and smelled old cigarette or stale smoke? While the last smoker may have left hours ago, the lingering odors and resulting residue that clings to walls, carpets, car seats, etc. are a result of thirdhand smoke.

- ***Can spray tans give you cancer?***

Sunless tanning products have no known risk for skin cancer, but you do have to be careful. Spray tans, lotions, or gels use a color additive called DHA that makes your skin look tan. DHA is considered safe for use on the outside of your body by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but may have unknown health risks because people can breathe in the spray, or the tanner may end up on their lips or eye area. You need to make sure it does not get into your nose, eyes, or mouth.

- ***Does the HPV vaccine contain the live virus?***

No. The HPV vaccine does not contain any live virus, or even killed virus or DNA from the virus, so it will not cause cancer or any other HPV-related illness. The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. The HPV vaccine, like any medicine, can have side effects. The most common side effects of the HPV vaccine include: pain, redness, or swelling in the arm where the shot was given, fever, headache or feeling tired, nausea, muscle or joint pain.

- ***How can I help?***

Learning how to communicate in difficult situations is important to help us stay connected with the people we care about. Many people dealing with cancer say that the worst thing you can do, is to do nothing and the worst thing you can say, is to say nothing. Remember, we can grieve or feel a loss in many kinds of situations. If one has no personal experience with cancer, it might be helpful to think of a time when you went through something hard or challenging. It is important to remember that it is okay to feel whatever it is you are feeling. You can find a list of cancer support resources here or in your teacher manual. It may also be helpful to identify any local resources that offer support or connect with a social worker. If you want to become a cancer advocate yourself, please apply online to become a Cancer Pathways Teen Ambassador!

## Common Cancer Terms

- **Cancer** is a term for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade nearby tissues. Cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems.
- A **tumor** is a mass of cells that can either be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).
- **Malignant** is another word for cancerous. Malignant cells can invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.
- **Metastatic cancer** is when the cancer has spread from the original site. Cancer most commonly spreads to the liver, lungs, bone, or brain. When cancer has metastasized or spread, it is considered more advanced cancer and becomes more difficult to treat.
- A **risk factor** is something that increases the chance of developing a disease. Some examples of risk factors include tobacco use, UV ray exposure, human papillomavirus (HPV), certain chemicals, radiation, air pollution, and secondhand smoke.
- A **vaccine** is a substance or group of substances meant to cause the immune system to respond to a tumor or to microorganisms, such as bacteria or viruses. A vaccine can help the body recognize and destroy cancer cells or microorganisms. The HPV vaccine is used to protect people from certain cancers such as cervical, head and neck, anal, and more.
- A **biopsy** is the removal of cells or tissues for examination by a pathologist. There are many different types of biopsy procedures. The most common types include: (1) incisional biopsy, in which only a sample of tissue is removed; (2) excisional biopsy, in which an entire lump or suspicious area is removed; and (3) needle biopsy, in which a sample of tissue or fluid is removed with a needle.
- A **treatment plan** is a detailed plan with information about a patient's disease, the goal of treatment, the treatment options for the disease and possible side effects, and the expected length of treatment. Common cancer treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and more