Children and Young People with Cancer in Scotland

An Official Statistics release for Scotland
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About this release
This release by Public Health Scotland (PHS) provides information on cancer in children (ages 0-14) and young people (ages 15-24) in Scotland, using age-appropriate cancer classifications.

Main points
- Each year in Scotland around 330 children and young people (CYP) under 25 years are diagnosed with cancer; almost one person every day. The number of new cases has been increasing in children but remained stable in young people between 2010 and 2019.
- In the ten-year period 2010-2019, 1,312 children (aged 0-14, 53% male) and 1,970 young people (aged 15-24, 52% female) were diagnosed with cancer.
- Cancer occurrence in children and young people varies by age and sex.
- Nearly one third (31%) of childhood cancers were leukaemia and just over a quarter (26%) were cancers of the brain and central nervous system (CNS).
- The most common diagnoses in young people were carcinomas (22%), lymphomas (19%) and CNS tumours (14%).
- While survival rates are high from most cancers in children and young people, 1 in 15 children (6.6%) and 1 in 30 young people (3.3%) dies in the first year after a cancer diagnosis.
- Most children and young people will be cured of their cancer. 86% of children diagnosed with cancer, and 90% of young people diagnosed with cancer can expect to be alive at least five years after the diagnosis. However, some cancers are harder to treat than others and collaborative working with palliative care services is essential.
- Cancer is the commonest cause of disease-related death in children and young people. In Scotland, around 40 CYP die from cancer every year. Similar proportions of CYP died in hospital (46%) or at home/a private address (40%), while one in seven (14%) died in a hospice.
- For the 2,584 children diagnosed with cancer (aged 0-14) between 2000 and 2019, 2,055 of them were still alive as at 31 December 2019. For the 3,895 young people diagnosed with cancer (aged 15-24) between 2000 and 2019, 3,194 of them were still alive as at 31 December 2019. Similarly, there were 3,790 people still alive at 31 December 2019 of the 5,733 who had been diagnosed with cancer as a child at any time between 1975 and 2019; this gives the 45-year prevalence figure. The corresponding 45-year prevalence for the 8,121 young people diagnosed with cancer between 1975 and 2019 was 5,635.
- These numbers of cancer survivors have major resource implication for medics, nurses, and Allied Health Professionals who provide long term follow-up and they have impacts upon other departments such as radiology, fertility and cardiology.
Background

The occurrence and outcomes of cancer in children and young people (CYP) in Scotland deserves particular attention. Our existing publications on cancer incidence include CYP using a classification of cancer types based on anatomical site, which is more suited to cancers diagnosed in adults. Many adult cancers are caused by modifiable lifestyle factors or are associated with increasing age. The determinants of cancers in CYP are very different. As children and young people usually live many decades after a diagnosis of cancer, the implications for their future health, including fertility, are different to those of adults diagnosed in later life.

Improving the wellbeing of children and young people after cancer treatment, and into their adulthood, has increasing major resource implications, not only on paediatric and adult cancer services, but also other fields, such as radiology, fertility and cardiology for long term follow-up.

This publication has been developed in collaboration with the Managed Service Network for Children and Young People with Cancer. Information is included on cancer incidence, survival, mortality, place of death and prevalence covering the years 2010-2019.

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Find out more

Data from this publication are available from the publication page on our website.

The next release of this publication will be September 2022. Other formats of this publication are available on request at: 0131 314 5300

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