

students with lymphoma

What is lymphoma?

Lymphoma is the most common blood cancer in the United States, accounting for nearly 5% of all new cancer cases each year. Children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 are at the highest risk. There are two main types of lymphoma:

- **Hodgkin Lymphoma (HL)**
- **Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL)**

Both types begin in white blood cells called lymphocytes, which are part of the immune system. Lymphoma starts when a lymphocyte becomes abnormal and continues to divide uncontrollably. Because lymphatic tissue exists throughout the body, lymphoma can begin in a lymph node and spread to other areas.

HL is diagnosed when Reed-Sternberg cells or Hodgkin cells are present and is more common in adolescents and young adults. NHL usually begins in B cells and can be either slow-growing (indolent) or fast-growing (aggressive), with symptoms ranging from mild to severe.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the lymphoma. Common therapies include:

- **Chemotherapy:** Administered orally, intravenously, or into the spinal fluid via spinal tap. Delivered in cycles lasting several weeks.
- **Radiation Therapy:** Uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells, shrink tumors, and relieve pain. Typically given five times a week for several weeks.
- **Stem Cell Transplant:** Replaces damaged bone marrow cells with healthy ones from the patient or a donor. Often combined with high-dose chemotherapy and sometimes radiation.
- **Other Treatments:** May include surgery, biological therapy, targeted therapy, or plasmapheresis.

Children may receive treatment in a hospital or clinic on a daily or weekly basis for several weeks.

How can lymphoma affect a student at school?

Children may attend school during treatment if medically approved. However, both short- and long-term side effects can impact learning. The most common school-related challenges for students with lymphoma include:

- **Academic:** frequent absences, drop in academic performance, difficulty with memory and planning, delayed comprehension, slow processing, speech and language delays, ADHD like symptoms
- **Social/Emotional:** reduced social interaction, social withdrawal, difficulty with peer relationships, low self-esteem, poor body image, depression, loneliness, irritability
- **Physical:** difficulties with fine motor skills, mouth sores, nausea, vomiting, hair loss, fatigue, anemia, motor weakness, possible mobility aids or prosthetics, vision or hearing issues

How can schools support students with lymphoma?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Conduct **evaluations** for speech, OT/PT, vision/hearing, assistive technology, as needed.
- Offer **homebound** or **intermittent homebound** instruction for extended absences.
- Provide **extended school year** services (winter, spring, summer) if needed.
- Assign a manageable **workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Provide **assistive technology** (computer, tablet, word processor).
- Use **organizational tools** such as checklists, planners, and visual schedules.
- Use **multi-sensory teaching methods** (visual, auditory, tactile) and repetition.
- Record lessons and offer **memory-building** activities.
- Review previously introduced **abstract concepts** daily before introducing new ones.

Social and Emotional

- Allow **hats or scarves** for hair loss and provide peer sensitivity training when appearance changes occur.
- Create opportunities for **academic and social success** and highlight the student's strengths to build confidence.
- Limit **competitive activities** to reduce stress and prevent discouragement.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.

Physical

- Provide **two sets of textbooks** (home and school) to reduce fatigue.
- Allow **water bottles** and **snack breaks** during the day.
- Monitor the student during **physical activities** and recess.
- Offer **unrestricted bathroom access** and clinic/nurse passes.
- Modify or excuse from **strenuous physical activities**.
- Allow **early dismissal** from class to avoid crowded hallways.
- Permit **rest breaks** or shortened school days as needed.
- Assign **lockers close** to classrooms or provide two lockers (e.g., upstairs and downstairs).
- Provide a **parking space** near the entrance for easy access.
- Allow **elevator access** if stairs pose a safety risk.
- Maintain **consistent communication** with families (emails, progress notes, conferences).

More Resources

- **American Cancer Society**
[cancer.org/](https://www.cancer.org/)
- **Blood Cancer United**
[bloodcancerunited.org/](https://www.bloodcancerunited.org/)
- **Going to School During and After Cancer Treatment**
[cancer.org/cancer/childhood-cancer/](https://www.cancer.org/cancer/childhood-cancer/)
- **National Cancer Institute**
[cancer.gov/](https://www.cancer.gov/)

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit [childrens.com/school-services](https://www.childrens.com/school-services)

