



CANCER AUSTRALIA

Leukaemia

Definition

- Leukaemia occurs in the bone marrow, where blood cells are made. Abnormal white blood cells multiply rapidly and spill into the blood stream, crowding out healthy cells. There are many forms of leukaemia and are generally classified broadly as chronic (develops slowly) or acute (develops quickly). The most common forms of leukaemia are chronic and acute forms of lymphoid leukaemia and myeloid leukaemia.

Incidence and mortality

- In 2005, leukaemia was the eighth most common cancer in Australia.
- Leukaemia accounted for 2.5 per cent of new cancer cases in 2006 with 2624 cases. Males accounted for 1513 (2.6 per cent) new cases reported, females for 1111 (2.4 per cent) new cases reported.
- The lifetime risk of developing leukaemia before the age of 75 is 1 in 116, with a higher risk in males (1 in 96) than females (1 in 145).
- The incidence of the 2 most common forms of leukaemia in 2006 were:
 - Lymphoid leukaemia: 1324 new cases (788 males and 536 females)
 - Myeloid leukaemia: 1243 new cases (695 males and 548 females).
- In 2007, leukaemia was responsible for 1469 deaths in Australia, accounting for 3.7 per cent of all cancer deaths. Leukaemia caused 892 male deaths and 577 female deaths.
- The number of deaths relating to the 2 forms of leukaemia in 2007 were:
 - Lymphoid leukaemia: 424 deaths (252 males and 172 females)
 - Myeloid leukaemia: 896 deaths (551 males and 345 females).

Trends

- The incidence and mortality rates of leukaemia have remained relatively stable over the last 20 years, with incidence increasing 8 per cent and mortality rates decreasing 14 per cent.
- The incidence and mortality rates of leukaemia increase with age, however it is the most common form of childhood cancer.

Relative survival

- 48.2 per cent of males and 47.3 per cent of females affected by leukaemia will be alive 5 years after their diagnosis.

Risk factors

- Risk factors that increase the chance of developing leukaemia may include genetic history, exposure to intense radiation and certain chemicals including benzene and viruses such as the Human T-Cell Leukaemia virus.

Sources: This factsheet draws on data published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, including in:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010. Australia's Health 2010. Australia's health series no. 12. Cat. no. AUS 122. Canberra: AIHW.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Cancer Australia & Australasian Association of Cancer Registries 2008. Cancer survival and prevalence in Australia: cancers diagnosed from 1982 to 2004. Cancer series no. 42 Cat. no. CAN 38. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) & AACR (Australasian Association of Cancer Registries) 2008. Cancer in Australia: an overview, 2008. Cancer series no. 46. Cat. no. CAN 42. Canberra: AIHW.
- www.aihw.gov.au/cancer/data/acim_books (viewed 28/9/2010) - 2006 incidence and 2007 mortality data.

The figures quoted relate to cancers C91-C95, as classified under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD – 10).

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