

## EARLY DETECTION OF CHILDHOOD CANCER CAN SAVE LIVES

In recognition of Cancer Awareness Month in September, the South African National Cancer Registry (NCR), a division of the National Health Laboratory Service, has chosen to focus on cancers that affect children.

Although childhood cancers are very rare, the incidence rate is increasing and each year between 800 and 1,000 children are diagnosed with cancer in South Africa, and approximately 400,000 children abroad. In South Africa, the five most common childhood cancers include Lymphomas, brain and spinal cord tumours, Nephroblastoma (or Wilms tumours) and soft tissue sarcomas, with Leukemia classified the most prevalent among the youth.

It is estimated that less than half of children with cancer in South Africa are diagnosed, with the majority of cases only diagnosed during the advanced stages of the illness. This is partly due to a lack of awareness regarding the early warning signs of childhood cancer. "Early diagnosis can save lives", stresses head of the NCR, Dr Elvira Singh. "Health workers are implored to familiarise themselves with the St SILUAN warning signs, as childhood cancers can often go undetected due to the symptoms and signs being similar to that of other illnesses."

St SILUAN is an effective method to aid early detection, as 85% of paediatric cancers are associated with the following signs and symptoms:

**NATIONAL HEALTH LABORATORY SERVICE**  
National Cancer Registry

Look out for these warning signs and symptoms

St SILUAN warning signs of  
**CHILDHOOD**  
— **CANCER** —

<b>S</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>SEEK</b>	<b>EYE</b>	<b>LUMP</b>	<b>UNEXPLAINED</b>	<b>ACHING</b>	<b>NEUROLOGICAL</b>
medical help early for ongoing symptoms	White spot in the eye, new squint, sudden blindness or bulging eyeball	on the stomach, pelvis, head, arms, legs, testicle or glands	fever present for over two weeks, weight loss, fatigue, pale appearance, easy bruising & bleeding	bones, joints, back and easy fractures	signs a change in walk balance or speech, regression, continuous headaches with / without vomiting & enlarged head



### **Looking towards the future**

"In an effort to improve childhood cancer management locally, it is encouraging to note that The South African Childhood Cancer Policy is currently in development. And cancers of children, adolescents and young adults have recently been added as a national priority to the National Cancer Strategic Framework for South Africa," Singh optimistically adds.

Given the incredible impact of childhood cancer society as a whole, the NCR is working towards establishing a dedicated childhood cancer registry, using the International Classification of Childhood Cancers (ICCC-3), as recommended by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). "The purpose of this registry is to provide a more accurate estimation of the burden of childhood cancer in South Africa, and by publishing annual childhood cancer incidence reports, the objective is to increase overall awareness of childhood cancers," she concludes.

A feather in the cap of NCR is that they have been recently identified as an IARC-GICR Collaborating Center on childhood cancers for sub-Saharan Africa. An initiative of IARC and Global Initiative for Cancer Registry Development (GICR), the NCR team will train and mentor national cancer registries on childhood cancer registration in the region.

### **Reporting Childhood Cancers**

Health establishments, laboratories, and health workers, including clinicians, Paediatric Oncologists and Clinical Haematologists are reminded to report all new paediatric cancer cases to the NCR, by completing the notification form and submitting it to [cancer.registry@nhls.ac.za](mailto:cancer.registry@nhls.ac.za)

For further information or queries, contact the NCR Administrator, Evelyn Nkosi via email to [EvelynN@nicd.ac.za](mailto:EvelynN@nicd.ac.za)

### **More about the NCR**

The NCR has been serving as South Africa's main source of national cancer incidence data for nearly 4 decades. In 2011, the NCR was legally established with cancers being classified a notifiable disease. This led to the development of the Ekurhuleni Population Based Cancer Registry (EPBCR), a population-based cancer registry, that has been collecting cancer data from the Ekurhuleni metropolitan municipality since 2017.

END

