

Clinical Trials Improve Care and Treatment of Childhood Cancer



Why clinical trials matter

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is a leader in developing new ways to treat serious diseases in children, including childhood cancer. Clinical trials are very important to find safe and effective treatments for children with cancer.

Over the last 60 years, research has greatly improved survival rates. Today, nearly 9 in 10 children (86%) with cancer in the United States survive long-term. This is up from only 1 in 10 (10%) in the 1950s.

Children are different from adults in how their bodies grow and work. Clinical trials that include children are needed to help us find treatments that work for them. The findings from clinical trials also can help us reduce side effects now and in the future.

Types of clinical trials

Observational trials collect information about a patient's medical condition without changing their treatment.

Interventional trials test changes in how a medical condition is found, monitored, or treated. They can be:

- Treatment: Focused on treating the condition
- Non-treatment: Focused on research, not treatment

Safety in clinical trials

Clinical trials for children are designed to test new therapies and keep children safe. Extra rules are in place to protect children in research. These include rules about consent, since children cannot make their own health care decisions. The rules also cover risks and benefits, ethics, and other topics.

Every clinical trial must be reviewed and approved by a group of experts called a review board. The review board:

- Watches over the study as it happens
- Makes sure the study is fair and ethical
- Checks that the study focuses on important questions to help children's health and well-being

Clinical trials compared to standard medical care

Clinical trials are different from standard medical care. In clinical trials:

- The treatment is experimental (not fully tested yet).
- Treatment follows a research plan.
- The benefits of treatment and side effects are not fully known.
- Patients may get standard medical care plus experimental treatment. Or they may get experimental treatment only.

In standard medical care:

- The treatment has already been tested and approved.
- Care is based on what the patient needs based on patients with the same cancer who previously received the therapy.
- The benefits of treatment and side effects are known.
- The patient only gets standard medical care.

How clinical trials help

Most treatments we use today were first studied in clinical trials.

When children take part in a clinical trial, they help find new treatments and cures. They also help find ways to improve the health and quality of life of others.

Clinical trials may study:

- New medicines
- Medicines already used for other diseases or groups of patients
- Different amounts of medicines or schedules for taking them
- Ways to make other treatments work better
- Combinations of treatments
- New methods, devices, or equipment

How to take part in clinical research

If you are interested in having your child join a clinical trial, the first thing you should do is to talk with someone who is part of your child's care team.

SCEO # 18374791474 | Last Revised 12/08/25

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