



Seattle Eye M.D.s

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Retinoblastoma

Retinoblastoma, a malignant tumor that grows in the retina, the layer of light-sensing cells in the back of the eye, can destroy a child's vision and be fatal. Affecting children of all races, boys and girls equally, retinoblastoma occurs in one or both eyes, usually in the first year or two of life.

The most common sign is a change in the color of the pupil, which can appear white in reflected light. This phenomenon is referred to as a cat's eye reflex. Sometimes the affected eye will cross or turn outward. Retinoblastoma can be hereditary and is more likely to develop in children with a family history of the disease.

With early diagnosis, retinoblastoma treatment is remarkably effective. More than 90% of children survive and many eyes are saved with a combination of medications, radiation therapy, and heat, freezing, or laser treatments. In severe cases, the affected eye is removed.

If a child has had retinoblastoma there is an increased chance for a second cancer to develop. Children with retinoblastoma should have regular examinations by an ophthalmologist and a pediatric oncologist.