

Executive Summary

In April 2025, a group of Scott County residents contacted the Lenowisco Health District (comprising the counties of Lee, Wise, and Scott and the City of Norton) expressing concern about the number of childhood cancer cases in their community. After consulting the Virginia Cancer Registry (VCR), the Lenowisco Health District collected information via a survey to begin the investigation process, which was submitted to the VCR at the end of July 2025.

The VCR underwent an initial investigation, following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s *Guidelines for Examining Unusual Patterns of Cancer and Environmental Concerns*. For this investigation, the analysis was limited to Scott County children ages 0-19 between 2014-2023. Because cancer registry data are incomplete statewide for 2024-2025, only cases from 2014-2023 (10 years) were included in the analysis. This lag is in line with other cancer registries across the nation due to the time it takes for cases to be reported (up to six months), verifying cases, cleaning and quality control steps, and the exchange of data with neighboring states, which are standards set by the CDC and the North American Association for Central Cancer Registries (NAACCR). Cancer types evaluated included the following cancers that were reported by Scott County in the community survey and in the VCR from 2014-2023: bone and joints, leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, other endocrine including thymus, testis, and thyroid.

After verifying all received cases, the VCR team matched cases to the registry to review case notes to confirm diagnoses and cancer types to investigate. The VCR applied the Standardized Incidence Ratio (SIR) test to each pediatric cancer type in Scott County to evaluate whether the observed cases were more than what would be expected using rates seen overall in Virginia. Five matched cases that met the criteria for inclusion along with three additional cases within the registry were analyzed. Findings did not suggest that pediatric cancer rates in Scott County between 2014-2023 differed significantly from those observed statewide, and therefore did not represent a cancer cluster during this time period.

Subject matter experts in environmental epidemiology and public health toxicology reviewed community concerns related to radon, drinking water (public and private), and industrial sites. Additionally, cases were mapped geographically to assess for potential shared environmental exposure. The review did not suggest a pattern for a shared environmental exposure.

Based on all information reviewed, the VDH recommends:

- Continued assessment of Scott County pediatric cancer cases occurring in 2024 and 2025, and coordinating with federal partners as appropriate and in alignment with CDC guidance on cancer cluster investigations.
- Community members follow the VDH-recommended schedule for testing private well water and Environmental Protection Agency recommendations for testing radon.
- No epidemiological study of potential environmental exposures at this time.

Resources

ASK Childhood Cancer Foundation

<https://www.askccf.org/>

Blood Cancer United (formally Leukemia and Lymphoma Society):

<https://bloodcancerunited.org/>

Coalition Against Childhood Cancer

<https://www.cac2.org/>

National Cancer Institute: Childhood Cancers

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/childhood-cancers>

National Cancer Institute, Childhood Cancer Data Initiative

<https://www.cancer.gov/research/areas/childhood/childhood-cancer-data-initiative>

National Cancer Institute: State Cancer Profiles (includes childhood cancer data)

<https://statecancerprofiles.cancer.gov/>

VDH Directory of Licensed Septic System and Private Well Service Providers

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/onsite-sewage-water-services-updated/septic-system-and-private-well-service-providers/>

VDH Division of Onsite Water and Wastewater Services

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/environmental-health-services/onsite-sewage-water-services/>

VDH Indoor Radon Program

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/radiological-health/indoor-radon-program/>