

Travel Guide: Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC)

Address: 1275 York Avenue, New York, NY 10065

Website: www.mskcc.org

The prospect of taking your child for cancer treatment to any city other than your hometown is daunting -- make that city New York and it is even more so for most families. But, New York City can also become like a second home. The hospital is located in a safe, friendly, residential Upper East Side neighborhood, and the city has much to offer on days when your child is feeling well and free from the hospital. We hope to make the adjustment easier by providing information on many of the things that may impact your stay.

Directions:

From the airports—Cabs are the most convenient way to get to the hospital area from the area's airports, especially if you are carrying much luggage. However, cabs can be expensive, running from \$25-\$30 from LaGuardia to \$40-\$50 from JFK or Newark. A car service can be comparable in cost in some cases. One useful website for transportation options is www.nysubway.com/airport. It gives you approximate costs, times, and 'best bets' on all the alternative methods of transportation.

By car --If you are driving your own car, you have several options for local parking garages, but there is only one garage that MSKCC validates parking for patients at the Pediatric Day Hospital; however, first you have to fill out a form registering your car, which is available from the Pediatric Day Hospital staff. More information on parking and driving directions is available on the MSKCC website at the following link: <http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/5308.cfm#286690>

Where to stay:

Ronald McDonald House: 405 E. 73rd Street, New York, NY 10065
(On 73rd, between 1st Avenue and York Avenue, 6 blocks from the hospital)
212-639-0100.

If this is your first treatment away from home, 'the Ronald' (as the locals call it) can be a great place to feel connected to other people going through exactly what you are going through. Kids tend to make new friends very easily and the Ronald soon becomes your home away from home. You can find a good photo tour of the property at their website www.rmdh.org, which will give you a sense of what the facility looks like. There is also a link for making a reservation via email, if you choose. The charge for the rooms is very low or free depending on income—work through the MSKCC social worker to determine the current cost. There is sometimes money to subsidize the cost for families. The rooms at this Ronald McDonald House are much like hotel rooms. Each floor has laundry facilities and guest rooms. The first two floors and the basement are the primary shared living areas, including a large living room, kitchens and dining area, and a great playroom.

More details on the NYC Ronald McDonald House:

- 1) You may go through the MSKCC NB social worker to reserve your room, and you can usually confirm your room a day or two in advance.

- 2) Each family is assigned to one of several shared kitchen spaces, which are located just off the large communal dining room. Each family is given a kitchen number, an assigned storage space, and a refrigerator that is shared by the small number of other families assigned to the same kitchen.
- 3) The kitchens are fairly well stocked with cooking equipment, but there isn't much in the way of a shared pantry for basics. You may decide it is just easier to order carryout from the hundreds of restaurants in the area that deliver. The front desk has a folder of menus. (A favorite is Delizia Pizzeria, just around the corner on 1st Ave.)
- 4) Although there is no regular evening meal served by volunteers as in some other Ronald McDonald Houses, on many days and evenings there are special events, often with food and drinks provided.
- 5) Linens and towels are provided. You are expected to leave all linens clean and folded when you check out. (If you have an early check-out/departure flight, you should consider bringing your own linens from home).
- 6) Laundry facilities are free of charge, but are frequently busy.
- 7) The front desk is staffed 24 hrs a day and staff is available to help in any late-night emergencies.
- 8) Rooms are equipped with DVD players, VCRs, flat-screened TVs, and cable, and a library of DVDs is available for check-out at the front desk. The living room and playroom also have libraries of books for all ages.
- 9) There are many grocery stores, drug stores and delis close by on 1st Avenue.

Transportation to/from RMH:

In good weather, it is a pleasant 10-minute walk to the hospital, but there is weekday shuttle to and from the hospital (sign-up at the RMH front desk). They also have a limited amount of strollers and wheelchairs available to loan out. If you prefer to take a taxi, they are easy flag down from either 1st Ave or York Ave. It is not possible to call for a taxi for a pick up, but there are car services that can be called (e.g, Carmel at 212-666-6666).

If RMDH is full:

There are many hotels within a short distance of the hospital. The Ronald McDonald staff may make suggestions, you can consult with the social worker, or you may find additional hotel and long-term housing help on the hospital website www.mskcc.org (go to New Patients and then look under Accommodations). Hotel rates are high, running about \$200 or more per night. The hospital website also provides help through the Patient Representative Department at 212-639-7202.

Things to do in the area:

Central Park is within walking distance from the hospital and the Ronald. There you can find playgrounds, the historic Carousel (\$1.50 per ride) and the Children's Zoo with its penguins, polar bears, and petting zoo. Down the street from the RMH towards York Ave. is The Little Shop of Crafts where kids love to pick out and paint ceramic pieces (50% discount to guests of the Ronald.) Other city favorites are the huge Toys R Us in Times Square, FAO Swartz, American Girl Store, Dylan's Candy Bar, the Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Children's Museum of Manhattan, Broadway shows, and the Mets or the Yankees. There is of course tons to do and see in NYC, so you might want to do some on-line research before arrival to identify things of particular interest to your family.

NAVIGATING THE HOSPITAL

Prior to your first visit to MSKCC, it can be helpful to look through the hospital's website, starting with the Pediatric Cancer Care homepage, where you can find a photo tour of the pediatric facilities, pictures of the neuroblastoma team members, and much more. The site lists all the things you need

to bring with you—insurance information, social security number of your child, etc. There is a lot of very helpful information there to help prepare you for coming to MSKCC.

To find the Pediatric Day Hospital (PDH):

You may enter the hospital through four different entrances (through main entrance at York Ave., or from 67th or 68th Street or First Ave.), so learning the layout can be helpful. The PDH is located on the 9th floor and is accessed from the “B” elevators (on the 68th Street side of the building). There are staff/security near all of the street entrances who can direct you.

The first visit:

You will first check-in with the staff at the registration desk near the elevator on the 9th floor or the registration desk at the end of the lounge area. They will give the patient a bracelet, should be able to tell you whom you are seeing and where you need to be, and can often give you a printout of your appointment schedule for the day. On your first visit to MSKCC you will probably meet with the financial consultant, one of the NB doctors and/or nurse practitioners, and will have bloodwork and other tests run. These events may happen in any order, and there may be lots of waiting. You may be able to take care of most of the insurance issues beforehand over the phone, but may still need to sit down briefly with the insurance/financial consultant, who is conveniently located nearby.

A few tips:

- 1) Come prepared to stay for several hours—there are lots of activities, games, and even Nintendo systems in the playroom, but not much for adults.
- 2) There are complimentary coffee, juice, and some food available in a small kitchen off of the waiting area. Depending on the time of day and day of the week there may be bagels, sandwiches, donuts, and other surprises. Mini-boxes of cereal are available virtually all the time.
- 3) If you want to use the internet, there are a couple of computers in the waiting area available for patient/family use. You may also bring your own laptop and plug into one of their high-speed internet connection outlets—but this requires the right cable which you must bring yourself. These outlets are also located in each treatment room.

Dining options:

- 1) The hospital cafeteria has a wide range of things available and can be convenient. The surrounding neighborhood has a huge number of food options from Dunkin’ Donuts to gourmet fare—all within one block of the hospital. Many will deliver to the hospital.
- 2) If you are receiving treatment and assigned a room in the PDH, you may order lunch for your child and one caregiver as part of the hospital’s service. There is a limited menu that you order from in the morning, and it is delivered directly to your treatment room.

Other services:

- 1) The child life staff arranges events and activities every day. Check out www.mskcc.org for more details under Pediatric Cancer Care. From regular visits by clowns to karate, yoga, cooking, and crafts, there is always something happening.
- 2) There are also group sessions for teens and tweens, as well as for caregivers, that meet at least once each week.
- 3) School services are provided through the New York Public Schools with several teachers who are in the PDH each weekday. (These are provided for those who are of a legal age to attend school in NY, i.e., kindergarten and above, with a different teacher for lower and higher grades.) You may bring materials from your home school or the teachers will provide lesson materials for your child. Sometimes they work one-on-one with your child, and other times they work with a small group.

- 4) Depending on what type of treatment your child will be having, there are other support services available through the hospital. Ask the social worker to help you navigate which will be most appropriate for your child.

Inpatient Unit:

The inpatient unit is also located on the 9th floor. Although it is connected to the PDH, access between the two is not allowed. Direct access is from the M elevator bank right off the main waiting room (these elevators are reached most easily from either the main entrance on York Ave. or the 68th Street entrance). The inpatient side has its own smaller playroom with a few computers for patient and caregiver use. If patients are not feeling up to it, or are in isolation, child-life specialists or volunteers are usually available to bring toys, games, books and DVDs to rooms. Arrangements can be made to have someone play and watch over your child while you shower or just take a break. For caregivers there are a kitchen with free coffee and juice, showers and a laundry room available (laundry soap is for sale in the gift shop). The clowns stop by inpatient rooms a few times a week, and there are activities for patients each night throughout the week; e.g., Thursday there's bingo and Friday is candy-cart and movie night.

Unique to MSKCC:

Because there is a team of several doctors and nurse practitioners who specialize in NB, you may see a different doctor each day of treatment, or maybe not even see the doctor at all. They may check on your child indirectly if you are established in a treatment plan and things are going along smoothly and as intended. However, this is not to say they are not involved or that you will not see them regularly and whenever you need to. The doctors are always available and are checking on you, but you will have the most direct daily contact with the nurse practitioners on the NB team.

If you have been treated at other large-city hospitals, MSKCC shouldn't be too different. However, if you are from a small town, the size of the hospital, the large number of patients, and the general hustle-bustle can be a bit of an adjustment. You may feel at first that you are a very small cog in a large institutional wheel. However, very shortly you will grasp that you are in a world-class facility, that your child is being cared for by the finest experts, and that the myriad of support services are second to none. You will get to know not only the routine at MSKCC but the best place to get coffee and pizza on First Avenue, and will be on a first-name basis with the many wonderful people involved in your child's care -- and soon you will feel like an honorary New Yorker.

Please contact info@cncfhope.org with any comments