Understanding Retinoblastoma Genetics: A Guide for Families

Introduction to Retinoblastoma Genetics

Retinoblastoma is an eye cancer that primarily affects young children. Understanding the genetic aspects of retinoblastoma is crucial for managing the disease and planning for the future. There are two main types of genetic mutations associated with retinoblastoma: somatic mutations and germline mutations.

Somatic Mutation

- **Characteristics**: Somatic mutations are changes in the genes that occur in a single cell after conception. These mutations are not inherited from a parent and occur in only one eye.
- **Risks**:

  No Increased Risk: Children with somatic mutations do not have an increased risk for developing multiple tumors, bilateral tumors (in both eyes), pineoblastoma (a type of brain tumor), systemic tumors, or passing the mutation to their children.

Germline Mutation

- **Characteristics**: Germline mutations may or may not be inherited and present in every cell of the body. They can lead to retinoblastoma in one or both eyes.
- **Risks**:

  Increased Risk: Children with germline mutations have a higher risk of developing multiple tumors, bilateral tumors, pineoblastoma, brain tumors, systemic tumors in the long run, and can pass the mutation to future generations.

  Monitoring: It's essential for children with germline retinoblastoma to have the retinoblastomas treated and to undergo twice-yearly MRI scans of the brain until age 5 to monitor for pineoblastoma and other brain tumors. Lifelong follow-up is necessary for monitoring the risk of second cancers.

Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD)

- **Overview**: PGD is a new therapy that can help families affected by germline retinoblastoma avoid passing the mutation to future generations.
- **How It Works**: This process involves stimulating ovulation to produce multiple eggs, which are then fertilized with sperm. Only embryos without the retinoblastoma mutation are selected for implantation into the mother.
- **Benefits**: PGD offers hope for families wishing to prevent the transmission of germline retinoblastoma to their children.

Conclusion

Understanding the genetic underpinnings of retinoblastoma is vital for effective management and family planning. Whether dealing with somatic or germline mutations, staying informed and maintaining regular follow-ups with healthcare professionals can help manage risks and ensure the best outcomes for affected children and their families.

Contact Information

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact:

Shields, Shields and Lally, MDs
840 Walnut St, Suite 1440
Philadelphia, PA USA, 19107
Phone: 215-928-3105
Fax: 215-928-1140

Email: registration@shields.md

This informational brochure was given to the patient/family and is intended to provide a general understanding of retinoblastoma genetics. For specific medical advice, please consult a genetic counselor or your healthcare provider.