

A Quick Guide to CF in High School

CF is a genetic disease that causes thick, sticky mucus in the body, mainly affecting the lungs and digestive system. There is no cure for CF and daily treatment is needed to keep healthy.

With a little bit of planning and good communication, CF can be successfully managed at school. A Student Medical Plan detailing any CF care required at school is recommended.

Symptoms

CF affects many different organs and symptoms will vary from one person to another. It is important to know what's normal for the student in your care so you can discuss any change in symptoms with them and their parents.

Respiratory

The most common respiratory symptom is a cough, which is not contagious to others. People with CF need to cough to clear the mucus from their lungs. Coughing should not be discouraged, however students may need to discreetly leave the classroom to avoid embarrassment.

Digestive

Many people with CF will also have digestive symptoms, including:

- Difficulty gaining weight
- Abdominal pain, bloating, constipation or diarrhoea
- Strong smelling wind or stools

They may need quick access to the toilet and should be permitted to go when needed. They may spend longer in the toilet than other students.



Nutrition

A healthy diet is different for everyone. Recess and lunch for a student with CF might contain more high fat, high calorie foods because of digestive issues as well as the extra energy their body uses to breathe, cough and fight infection in the lungs. A healthy weight is important for maintaining healthy lungs.

Digestive Enzymes

Most people with CF require enzymes before they eat, to help digest food as their pancreas doesn't work properly. **Enzymes are not harmful to other students.**

It is important to develop a plan with the student and their parents to ensure enzymes are taken each day. This should be managed independently in high school. If enzymes are skipped, the student can experience abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

Dehydration

People with CF are at a greater risk of dehydration due to increased salt loss in sweat. Dehydration can make mucus in the airways even stickier and more difficult to clear. It is important to understand the signs of dehydration such as lethargy, irritability and salt crystals on the skin.

You can help prevent and manage dehydration by:

- Allowing easy access to water at all times
- Encouraging students to drink during sport
- Allowing extra salt or electrolytes to be taken as needed

Infection Control

Due to thick sticky mucus in the lungs, colds, flus and other infectious diseases can be more serious for people with CF. Good school cleaning practices, encouraging good hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette in the classroom is the best way to minimise the spread of germs. Students who are unwell should not attend school until their symptoms have cleared.

Environmental Risks

There are also infection risks in the environment for people with CF, such as still or stagnant water, damp soil, hay and mulch. Bacteria found in these environments can cause damage to the lungs of a person with CF. Discuss any precautions with the student and their parents.

Cross Infection

People with CF need to maintain a safe distance from each other due to the risk of cross infection, which is the sharing of CF germs in the lungs. If you have more than one student with CF attending your school, please ensure parents are aware and discuss strategies to ensure both students can be kept safe. Students should not be placed in the same classes and should not sit together at large school events or on buses. Please consider the confidentiality of individual students when having these discussions.

Other Considerations

People with CF have the same capacity to learn and you should have the same expectations of their behaviour as other students in your class. They can participate in all school activities including camps and excursions, however some considerations may need to be discussed including environmental risks and ensuring treatment can continue while they are away.

Each child with CF in your care will have their own unique challenges and may have additional issues that need to be managed at school including other CF related conditions or more complex care needs. These additional challenges can all be successfully managed with good communication with parents and some extra support.

CF treatment has come a long way, and is continuing to advance, enabling people with CF to live longer, healthier lives. Learning how to manage CF at school is an important part of helping children with CF develop independence in a supportive environment.

More Information

For more information about CF, we have free eLearning modules and other resources available on our [CFSmart website](https://www.cfsmart.org.au).