

A Quick Guide to CF in Primary 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 detailed Student Medical Plan should cover any CF care required at school.

Symptoms

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

Respiratory

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

Digestive

Many children 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. Alongside fruit and vegetables, a lunchbox for a child with CF might contain 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 children with CF require enzymes before they eat, to help digest food as their pancreas doesn't work properly. **Enzymes are not harmful to other children.**

It is important to develop a plan with the parent or carer to ensure enzymes are taken each day. Younger children may need supervision or assistance from staff with this. If enzymes are skipped, the student can experience tummy aches and diarrhoea.

Dehydration

Children 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 younger children to drink frequently
- Allowing extra salt or electrolytes, in consultation with parents

Infection Control

Due to thick sticky mucus in the lungs, colds, flus and other infectious diseases can be more serious for children with CF. Good school cleaning practices, teaching children to cover their coughs and sneezes and encouraging hand hygiene are the best way to minimise the spread of germs. Children who are unwell should not attend school until their symptoms have cleared.

Environmental Risks

There are also infection risks in the environment for children 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 child with CF. Discuss any precautions with parents.

Cross Infection

Children 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 children can be kept safe. Children should not be placed in the same classroom and should not sit together at whole school events or on buses. Please consider the confidentiality of individual children when having these discussions.

Other Considerations

Children 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).