

A Quick Guide to CF in the Early Learning Environment

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 in an early learning environment. A detailed Medical Plan should cover any CF care required at daycare/kindy.

Symptoms

CF affects many different organs and symptoms will vary from one person to another. Some children will have symptoms from birth, others will develop over time.

It is important to know what's normal for the child in your care and communicate any new symptoms or any change in symptoms with 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.

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



Nutrition

A healthy diet is different for everyone. Most children with CF need a high calorie, high fat and high salt diet along with digestive enzymes, to maintain a healthy body weight. A healthy weight is important for maintaining healthy lungs. Children with CF might need extra snacks to help meet their daily nutritional requirements.

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. If enzymes are skipped, the child 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 children to drink frequently
- Offering extra salt, 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 centre cleaning practices, teaching children to cover their coughs and sneezes and encouraging hand hygiene are the best ways to minimise the spread of germs. Children who are unwell should not attend the centre/kindy 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 child with CF attending your centre/class, please ensure parents are aware and discuss strategies to ensure both children can be kept safe. 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 children in your care.

Each child with CF will have their own unique challenges and may have additional issues that need to be managed in an early learning environment 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 children with CF to live longer, healthier lives. Learning how to manage CF in the early learning environment 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 for educators, available on our [CFSmart website](https://www.cfsmart.org.au).