

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 bit of planning and good communication, CF can be successfully managed in an early learning environment. A detailed individual CF Action Plan should cover any CF care required at day care.

Symptoms

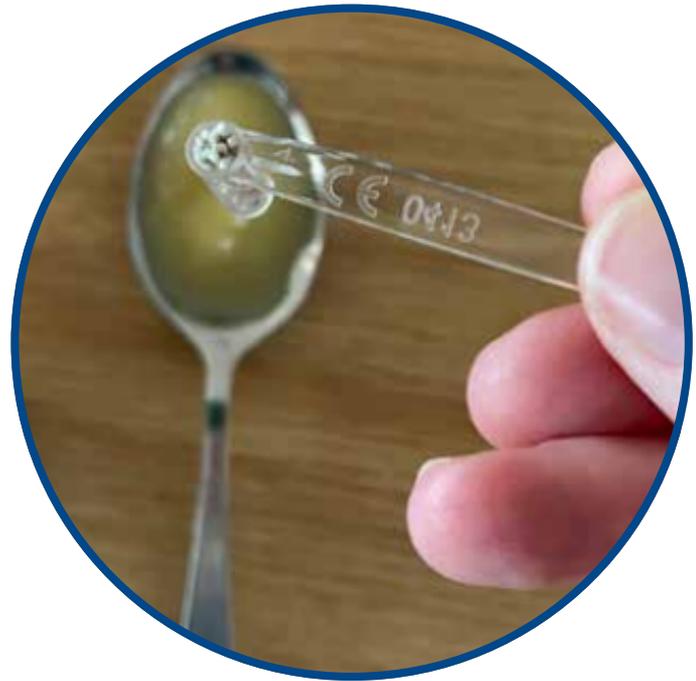
CF affects various organs and symptoms will vary from one person to another. It is important to know what's normal for the child in your care so you can discuss any change in symptoms to the parents.

The most common respiratory symptom is a cough, which is not contagious to others. Children with CF need to cough to clear mucus from their lungs. Coughing should not be discouraged.

Many children with CF will also have digestive symptoms, including difficulty gaining weight, abdominal pain, bloating, constipation or diarrhoea as well as strong smelling wind/stools.

Nutrition

A healthy diet is different for everyone. Some children with CF need a high calorie, high salt diet using good fats, 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 know 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

People with CF should avoid close or prolonged contact with each other to avoid sharing infections. It is recommended that they maintain a distance of 4m apart, particularly in small, enclosed spaces. If you have more than one individual with CF attending your centre/kindy, including staff and parents, please ensure strategies are put in place to keep everyone safe. Please consider the confidentiality of individuals when having these discussions. People with CF should not be in the same room on the same day and should avoid close contact at whole centre events and group excursions.

These recommendations may also apply to other people in the school community with chronic lung conditions or impaired immunity, however, does not include people from the same household with CF for example, siblings.

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.cfwa.org.au).