

School Guide for Students with Inflammatory Bowel Disease

What is Inflammatory Bowel Disease?

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a chronic disease affecting the intestines. Two forms of this disease are Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

- **Crohn's disease** is an ongoing disorder that causes swelling and redness in the digestive tract, and can also occur in the small intestine, mouth, esophagus, and stomach. Swelling goes deep into the lining of the affected organ which causes pain and frequent diarrhea. All layers of the intestine may be involved in Crohn's disease. Normal healthy bowel can be found between sections of diseased bowel.
- **Ulcerative colitis** affects the large intestine (or colon), causing redness and ulcers on the top layer of the lining of the large intestine.

The cause of IBD is thought to be an abnormal reaction to the body's immune system. White blood cells gather in the lining of the intestines producing chronic inflammation causing ulcerations and bowel injury. Neither form of IBD is contagious. There is no cure for either form. Flare ups can occur randomly. IBD is treated with various drugs, and sometimes surgery is required.

How can IBD affect School Performance?

Children with IBD are at risk of poor academic functioning because of the following:

- Poor attention and concentration
- Reduced capacity to process information
- Interruptions in memory/ Reduced ability to multitask
- Frequent absences due to illness/treatment
- Emotional complications (low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, irritability)
- Late Puberty/ Stunted growth
- Dietary restrictions for some
- Physical complications (frequent diarrhea, abdominal and rectal pain and cramping, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, arthritis-like joint pain, weight loss, rectal bleeding, occasional bowel incontinence, skin problems, headaches)
- Some treatments can cause student to be more susceptible to illness or intensify problems in cognitive functioning

How can schools assist students with IBD?

Academic:

- Start academic interventions under one of two laws: IDEA under (Other Health Impairment) or Section 504
- Assign moderate workload that emphasizes quality rather than quantity when out for illness or hospitalization
- Extend due date for lengthy projects, if during a time of illness
- “Stop the clock” during timed exam/quiz if cramping or bathroom visit required

Social/ Emotional

- Provide activities that build on student’s strengths to improve self-esteem
- Provide counseling if student becomes withdrawn or has difficulty with peers or adults
- Conduct a staff in-service for those involved with student

Physical

- Self-monitor capabilities during P.E., but do not discourage from involvement in sports
- A place to rest, if necessary
- Two sets of books or two lockers due to fatigue or problems with bone density
- Communication between school nurse, parent, student, and medical staff
- School to notify parent if an outbreak of any infectious disease occurs (Student is at a greater risk when taking immune suppressant drugs.)
- Keep a water bottle, snacks, as needed
- “Any time” bathroom pass
- Have easy access to the closest bathroom with privacy
- Seat near the door in case of urgency
- Student may need nurse/staff assistance for ostomy pouch emptying
- Change of clothes in the nurse’s office, if a younger student
- Allow older students to carry a small bag with change of clothes and sanitary wipes in case of bowel incontinence

Resources

www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov

www.ccfa.org

School Services Department

Children’s Health

Children’s Medical Center

Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733

Plano Campus: 469-303-4670