

Cross-Infection at School

Why is cross-infection among people with CF an issue?

Research has shown that people with cystic fibrosis (CF) can risk spreading certain germs to others who have CF, this is referred to as cross-infection.

In a person with CF, the lungs and digestive system are affected by thick and sticky mucus, which causes difficulty with breathing and digestion.

Bacteria found naturally in the environment, which doesn't affect most people, can thrive in the lungs of people with CF, due to the conditions created by the thick sticky mucus. Once contracted, some of these germs are difficult to treat with antibiotics. If one person with CF has contracted a particular germ in their lungs, they can potentially pass it on to another person with CF if they are in close proximity, or from indirect contact from a contaminated surface.

Disclosure of student having CF

Parents and children have no obligation to disclose the diagnosis of CF to their school, however disclosing this information means that provisions can be made to decrease the risk of cross-infection.

Strategies to maintain a positive environment

CF can be a particularly isolating condition due to the cross-infection issue and this can affect people in different ways. Although it is really important for schools to work out strategies to reduce cross-infection risks, it is also essential to consider how each person might be feeling and to handle the situation with sensitivity.

Recommendations

If there is more than one person with CF in the school (unless they are siblings) the following recommendations need to be considered to reduce the risk of cross-infection:

- Students with CF should not be placed in the same classes/classrooms. This information should be reviewed each term and with any changes in timetable.

- If possible, schedule the use of common areas such as computer labs, art room and library, so there is at least 24 hours in between each person with CF using the space. If not possible, assign each student a specific desk, computer or art supplies.
- Students with CF should be assigned different toilet blocks to use.
- Students should have access to their own water bottle at all times and avoid using water fountains.
- The students will need to have lockers assigned in locations that are at least 4 metres or more apart from one another.
- Cleaning processes will need to be considered if students need to access areas such as the school nurse's office. The use of hydrogen peroxide-based cleaning products, such as Oxivir Tb, are recommended, to clean potentially contaminated surfaces.
- Attending whole school events such as assemblies and school carnivals are highly encouraged, however, with provisions for students to maintain a safe distance of at least 4 metres or more at all times.
- Avoid placing students in the same factions, form room classes, buddy classes or on buses together.
- Encourage good hand hygiene practices with access to liquid soap, hand drying facilities and alcohol-based hand gel.

Useful resources

- Infection Control in Schools Factsheet www.cfwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CF-Fact-Infection-Control-In-Schools1.pdf
- Common Infections Factsheet www.cfwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CF-Fact-Common-Infections.pdf
- Pseudomonas Factsheet www.cfwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CF-Fact-Pseudomonas.pdf
- CFSmart www.cfsmart.org
- Cystic Fibrosis Foundation www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Caring-for-a-Child-With-CF/Working-With-Your-Childs-School/When-There-s-More-Than-One-Person-With-CF-in-the-Same-School

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