

Cross-Infection at School

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 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 may be difficult to treat with antibiotics.

Why is Cross-Infection Among People with CF An Issue?

If one person with CF has contracted a particular germ in their lungs, they can potentially pass it on to another person with CF via either direct or indirect contact from a contaminated surface. The current Australian recommendation is to maintain a distance of 4 metres between people with CF to reduce the risk of cross-infection.

Do I Have To Tell The School That My Child Has CF?

Parents and children have no obligation to disclose the diagnosis of CF to their school and peers, however disclosing this information means that provisions can be made to decrease the risk of cross-infection. Informing a few key people in the school may be useful so they can help you manage 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 important for schools to work out reasonable and appropriate strategies to reduce risks, it is also essential to consider how each person might be feeling and to handle the situation with sensitivity.

Hand Hygiene

Good hand hygiene is the single most important measure in reducing the risk of cross-infection between people with CF, as well as the risk of spreading other infections, such as colds and flus. Schools should encourage good hand hygiene practices for all students and teachers with access to liquid soap, hand drying facilities and alcohol-based hand gel.

Other 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 should be reviewed annually and with any changes in timetable.
- Students should have access to their own water bottle at all times.
- Students with CF should be assigned different toilet blocks to use.
- Cleaning processes will need to be considered if students access common areas such as the school nurse's office. Attention should be given to the cleaning of equipment and wiping down surfaces.
- Attending whole school events such as assemblies and school carnivals are highly encouraged, however, with provisions for students to maintain a safe distance from each other where possible.

Useful Resources

- [CFSmart- CF Education Program](#)
- [Infection Control in Schools factsheet \(CFWA\)](#)
- [CFWA Factsheets](#)
- [When There's More Than One Person With CF in the Same School \(CF Foundation\)](#)

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