

students with neuromyelitis optica

What is neuromyelitis optica?

Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO), also known as Devic's Disease, is a rare condition that affects the central nervous system—specifically the optic nerves and spinal cord. NMO causes optic neuritis, which leads to pain and vision loss in one or both eyes, and/or transverse myelitis, which causes weakness, numbness, and sometimes paralysis in the arms or legs. It can also cause sensory changes and loss of bowel or bladder control.

These symptoms result from the immune system mistakenly attacking healthy cells in the central nervous system. NMO is not contagious. While there is no cure, treatments can help manage symptoms, treat flare-ups, and prevent future relapses.

How can neuromyelitis optica affect a student at school?

Symptoms vary from student to student. Some may experience only a few, while others may have more severe challenges. Children with **optic neuritis** may struggle in the following areas:

- **Physical:** eye pain (especially with movement), sore or tender eyes, mild to severe vision loss, dim or dull vision, reduced color perception, a central blind spot, headaches, nausea, worsening vision after exercise or heat exposure, seeing flashing lights even with eyes closed.

Children with **transverse myelitis** may struggle in the following areas:

- **Physical:** weakness in the arms or legs, difficulty walking, general pain, sensory changes (such as touch or temperature), bowel or bladder problems, muscle spasms, fatigue or discomfort, headaches, loss of appetite, breathing difficulties, depression or anxiety, cognitive or learning challenges

How can schools support students with neuromyelitis optica?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Conduct **evaluations** for speech, OT/PT, vision/hearing, assistive technology, as needed.
- Request a **vision assessment** to determine if visual aids are needed.
- Provide **enlarged printed notes** or allow use of a **recording device**.
- Offer **audio versions of reading materials** or enlarge written content.
- Allow use of an **eye patch** (if recommended by a physician) during reading or screen time.
- Adjust schedules to **avoid missing core classes** due to medical appointments.
- Allow **oral testing** or alternative response formats for lengthy writing tasks.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.

Social and Emotional

- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Assign a **trusted adult** as a point of contact for concerns.
- Maintain **frequent communication** between the student, family, school nurse, and medical team.

Physical

- Permit **rest breaks** or shortened school days as needed.
- Provide **two sets of textbooks** (one for home, one for school).
- Offer **elevator access** if mobility is affected.
- Allow **extra time to travel between classes**.
- Provide **permanent restroom and nurse passes**.
- Keep a **change of clothes** at school in case of accidents.
- Offer **adaptive physical education** if needed.
- Assign **two lockers** (e.g., one upstairs and one downstairs).
- Avoid **extreme heat** and activities that raise body temperature.

More Resources

- **Child Neurology Foundation - Neuromyelitis Optica**
childneurologyfoundation.org
- **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**
ninds.nih.gov/

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit childrens.com/school-services