

students with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

What is inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)?

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) is a chronic condition that affects the intestines. The two main types are:

- **Crohn's Disease:** Causes inflammation anywhere in the digestive tract, including the small intestine, mouth, esophagus, and stomach. It affects all layers of the intestinal wall and may cause pain and frequent diarrhea. Healthy sections of bowel may appear between inflamed areas.
- **Ulcerative Colitis:** Affects only the large intestine (colon), causing inflammation and ulcers on the surface lining.

IBD is believed to result from an abnormal immune system response. White blood cells gather in the intestinal lining, causing long-term inflammation and damage. IBD is not contagious. There is no cure, and flare-ups can happen unexpectedly. Treatment includes medication and, in some cases, surgery. Some treatments may increase susceptibility to illness or affect cognitive functioning.

How can IBD affect a student at school?

The most common school-related challenges for students with IBD include:

- **Academic:** frequent absences, difficulty focusing and paying attention, slower information processing, memory issues and trouble multitasking
- **Social/Emotional:** low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, irritability
- **Physical:** delayed puberty or slowed growth, dietary restrictions, diarrhea, abdominal and rectal pain, nausea and vomiting, fatigue, joint pain, weight loss, rectal bleeding, occasional bowel incontinence, skin problems and headaches

How can schools support students with IBD?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Assign a manageable **workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests during flare ups.

Social and Emotional

- Create opportunities for **academic and social success** and highlight the student's strengths to build confidence.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.

Physical

- Adjust and **encourage physical activities** based on the student's comfort level.
- Permit **rest breaks** as needed.
- Provide **two sets of textbooks** (home and school) to reduce fatigue.
- Allow **water bottles** and snack breaks during the day.
- Offer **unrestricted bathroom access** and clinic/nurse passes.
- Keep a **change of clothes** in the nurse's office for younger students.
- Allow older students to carry a **small bag with extra clothes** and sanitary wipes.
- Maintain **communication** between the school nurse, family, and medical team.
- Notify parents of any **infectious disease outbreaks** (students on immune-suppressing medication are at higher risk).

More Resources

- **Crohn's & Colitis Foundation**
crohnscolitisfoundation.org/
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**
niddk.nih.gov/
- **Nemours Kids Health**
kidshealth.org

SCHOOL SERVICES

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

