

# students with congenital heart defects (CHD)

## What are congenital heart defects?

Congenital Heart Defects (CHD) are structural problems in the heart that develop early in pregnancy. CHD is the most common type of birth defect, affecting about 1% of newborns. These defects can range from mild to severe. Some children may need surgery within their first year of life. It's important to know that CHD can be linked to developmental delays that may continue into adulthood. Children with significant congenital heart defects have a higher risk of experiencing challenges with behavior, emotions, social interactions, and academics.

### Treatment

While CHD cannot be prevented, there are treatments to help manage it. A cardiologist (heart doctor) may use a catheter (a thin, flexible tube) or perform surgery to repair the defect. Medications may also be prescribed to support heart function and overall health.

## How can congenital heart defects affect a student at school?

Children with CHD may face academic and behavioral challenges. Symptoms and effects vary, so it's important for families to communicate regularly with both medical providers and school staff. Children may struggle in the following areas:

- **Academic:** attention, processing speed, visual-spatial skills, cognitive challenges, ADHD symptoms, speech development, expressive language, visual-motor skills, learning disabilities, low self-esteem, reading comprehension and math memory
- **Social/Emotional:** feeling isolated, anxiety, frustration, aggression, depression, avoidance, low motivation, anxiety, depression before, during, or after treatment
- **Physical:** fatigue, nausea, vision/hearing problems, need for mobility aids

## How can schools support students with a congenital heart defects?

### Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Conduct evaluations for **speech, OT/PT, vision/hearing, assistive technology**.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Assign a **manageable workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Use organizational tools such as checklists, planners, and visual schedules.
- Use **multi-sensory teaching methods** (visual, auditory, tactile) and repetition.
- Provide printed copies of notes, highlighted materials, and **recorded lessons**.
- Offer **preferential seating** to reduce distractions.
- Provide **assistive technology** (computer, tablet, word processor).
- Excuse **tardiness and absences** for treatment or hospital stays.

## Social and Emotional

- Create opportunities for **academic and social success** and highlight the student's strengths to build confidence.
- Limit **competitive activities** to reduce stress and prevent discouragement.
- Provide **counseling or emotional support** as needed.
- Implement **behavior intervention plans** when needed.
- With parent consent, **educate peers** to promote understanding.

## Physical

- **Educate staff and peers** about the student's condition to reduce misunderstandings and support inclusion.
- Modify or excuse from **strenuous physical activities**.
- Monitor for **fatigue, distress, or breathing issues**.

## More Resources

- **American Heart Association**  
[heart.org](http://heart.org)
- **Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention - CHDs**  
[cdc.gov/heart-defects/index.html](http://cdc.gov/heart-defects/index.html)
- **MedlinePlus - Congenital Heart Defects**  
[medlineplus.gov/congenitalheartdefects.html](http://medlineplus.gov/congenitalheartdefects.html)
- **Nemours Kids Health**  
[kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org)

## SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit [childrens.com/school-services](http://childrens.com/school-services)

