

students with cystic fibrosis

What is cystic fibrosis?

Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is a life-threatening genetic condition that primarily affects the respiratory and digestive system. In children with CF, a gene causes the body to produce thick, sticky mucus. This mucus can block the lungs, pancreas, and other organs, leading to serious breathing and digestion problems. CF is not contagious and affects each child differently. Common symptoms include:

- Frequent respiratory infections
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Persistent coughing that may produce mucus
- Difficulty digesting food
- Upset stomach and fatigue
- Smaller body size compared to peers
- Frequent bowel movements

How can cystic fibrosis affect a student at school?

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

- **Academic:** frequent absences due to hospitalizations,
- **Social/Emotional:** low self-esteem, difficulty with peers
- **Physical:** managing medical needs during school day

How can schools support students with cystic fibrosis?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
 - If academic concerns continue, begin interventions and consider an IEP under “Other Health Impairment” (OHI).
- Maintain **consistent communication** with families (emails, progress notes, conferences).
- Assign a **manageable workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.

Social and Emotional

- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.
- **Evaluate the need for counseling** if the student becomes withdrawn or struggles socially.
- Consider placing the student in a **social skills group** with the school counselor.

Physical

- Offer **unrestricted bathroom access** and clinic/nurse passes due to digestive issues.
- Allow **water bottles** and **snack breaks** during the day.
- Ensure **extra food portions** and enough time to eat when medically necessary.
- Allow the student to take **pancreatic enzymes** with nurse supervision or independently if mature enough.

- **Educate staff and peers** about the student's condition to reduce misunderstandings and support inclusion.
- Encourage **participation in physical education** with rest breaks as needed.

Students with CF should be encouraged to participate fully in school and pursue their academic, career, and personal goals. With the right support, they can thrive alongside their peers.

More Resources

- **Cystic Fibrosis Foundation**
cff.org
- **Cystic Fibrosis Research Institute**
cfri.org

SCHOOL SERVICES

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

