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# Managing chronic diseases at school

Tips for students, parents and teachers to manage chronic health conditions

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Children with chronic health conditions – such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy or mental or behavioral health conditions – need extra attention at school to stay safe and healthy. With the right treatment plan and support, children with these conditions can flourish at school without putting their health at risk.

Stormee Williams, M.D., Vice President and Chief Health Equity Officer at Children's Health™, has helped to increase access to health care for students through our School-Based Telehealth Program and other telemedicine services. She encourages parents, teachers and children to take the following steps to manage chronic diseases at school.

## Prepare for chronic disease management with your child's doctor

Dr. Williams says parents should prepare for the school year in advance by making an appointment with their child's pediatrician or specialist who handles care for their chronic condition. At the appointment, parents should:

- Address any prescriptions their child needs, including refills of medications that can be left at school.
- Create and review your child's disease management plan. This plan should include health care provider contact information, parent or guardian contact information, description of diagnoses and a treatment plan for everyday management and emergency situations.
- Get any other medical supplies the child may need while at school.
- Sign a release of information form. This form is important so school nurses can get the information they need from a child's doctor in an emergency situation or if they cannot reach a parent. It allows all members of your child's care team to work together. Your child's school may also ask you to fill out an additional form for children with chronic illnesses that provides all of the information they need to support your child.

## Communicate with your child's school about their chronic health condition

"Once school starts, go in with the mindset of making sure the school knows everything they need to know about your child," says Dr. Williams. "Notify the school as soon as possible about your child's condition."

Parents and guardians should review their child's disease management plan with their school and ensure they have all of the needed information. This should include discussing where to leave any medications like inhalers, insulin or other medicines your child may need at school with specific instructions on how the medicines are used. If possible, speak with the school nurse personally about your child and their health concerns.

## Talk to your child about their health at school

Children should have an age-appropriate awareness of their condition as well as know how to use their medicines and treatment.

"Parents should empower children to take ownership of their health, helping them understand their condition and treatment to foster independence," Dr. Williams says.

For instance, younger elementary school students should know they have asthma, but may not be able to carry their asthma inhalers because they may not know when they need them. However, teens should be allowed to carry inhalers because they can recognize when they need them and use them safely.

"Talking to your child about their health condition can be difficult for parents," says Dr. Williams. "You do everything that your child needs, so sometimes it can be hard to pull back and let kids start to take the lead on managing their conditions."

## How teachers and school administrators can help children with chronic conditions

Teachers and school officials play a large role in keeping children with chronic conditions safe. Besides understanding a student's treatment plan, they can also take steps to improve the school environment.

"Creating a supportive learning environment for students of every ability and those with and without chronic illnesses is incredibly important," says Dr. Williams. "School officials should identify those children with chronic illnesses early on and have resources and staff available to manage those conditions."

Schools can also harbor a physically safe environment for children by:

- Installing wheelchair ramps
- Ensuring sidewalk, pavement and classroom floors are easy to navigate
- Being aware of, and avoiding, the use of substances that create fumes or strong smells
- Preparing food that is food-allergy safe
- Teaching staff members and students about bullying and inclusion
- Educating staff members to be sensitive to chronic illnesses
- Having a school nurse on campus throughout the day

With strong communication, a clear plan and a great school environment, parents, school administrators and health professionals can help ensure all children thrive, learn and grow at school.

## How to create a 504 plan

Creating a 504 plan is an important part of keeping a child with a chronic illness safe and healthy in the classroom. Get more guidance on how to create 504 plans for children with Celiac disease and other illnesses.

## Learn more

Learn more about supporting your child as they manage chronic illness with our School Based Telehealth Program.

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