

# students with transverse myelitis

## What is transverse myelitis (TM)?

Transverse Myelitis (TM) is a rare neurological condition caused by inflammation in the spinal cord. This inflammation damages the myelin—the protective covering around nerve fibers—and disrupts communication between the brain and body. The location of the damage determines which body functions are affected. Damage higher in the spinal cord typically causes more symptoms.

TM can develop gradually over several days or appear suddenly within hours. Most individuals experience only one episode, but a small number may have recurring symptoms, often linked to an underlying condition.

## How can transverse myelitis affect a student at school?

Symptoms vary depending on which part of the spinal cord is affected. The most common school-related challenges for students with transverse myelitis include:

- **Academic:** cognitive and learning challenges
- **Social/Emotional:** depression, anxiety
- **Physical:** weakness in arms and/or legs, difficulty walking, general pain, sensory changes, bowel and bladder issues, muscle spasms, fatigue or discomfort, headaches, fever, loss of appetite, breathing problems (if upper spinal cord is affected)

## How can schools support students with transverse myelitis?

### Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Adjust schedules to avoid missing **core subjects** due to medical appointments.
- Conduct **evaluations** for speech, OT/PT, vision/hearing, assistive technology, as needed.
- If hand function is affected:
  - Provide **printed notes** before class.
  - Allow **oral testing**.
  - **Do not penalize** handwriting.
  - Give **extra time** for assignments.

### Social and Emotional

- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Maintain **frequent communication** between the student, family, school nurse, and medical team.

### Physical

- Provide **two sets of textbooks** (one for home, one for school).
- Assign **two lockers** (e.g., one upstairs and one downstairs).

- 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.
- Allow participation in **school activities** with appropriate limitations.

## More Resources

- **Child Neurology Foundation - Transverse Myelitis**  
[childneurologyfoundation.org](http://childneurologyfoundation.org)
- **Mayo Clinic - Transverse Myelitis**  
[mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org)
- **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**  
[ninds.nih.gov/](http://ninds.nih.gov/)

## SCHOOL SERVICES

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

