

Physical Education and CF

CF is a multi organ disease which causes thick, sticky mucus in the lungs and digestive system. Physical activity is very important for people with CF. In addition to the general health benefits it offers everyone, it can specifically support people living with CF by improving lung function, strengthening bones and aiding in airway clearance (clearing mucus from the lungs).

There are some things to consider if you have a student with CF in your physical education class or participating in school sports events.

Please refer to their CF Action Plan which should detail their individual requirements.

Dehydration

People with CF are more susceptible to dehydration due to excess salt lost in their sweat. Dehydration impacts many systems in the body and causes symptoms such as dizziness, fatigue and headaches.

Importantly for people with CF, it also causes mucus in the body to be even thicker, which makes it more difficult to clear from the lungs. It can also make the digestive system clogged, leading to constipation and stomach pains.

Easy access to water during physical education is important and students should be encouraged to drink regularly. Salt replacement tablets and sports drinks may also be required in warmer weather.



Medication

Some students with CF may need to take Ventolin or other medications before physical education. They may also need to carry Ventolin with them during sport.

Coughing

During physical activity, students with CF may cough, wheeze or become breathless, even when they are well.

Coughing is encouraged to help keep their lungs clear and is not contagious to others. They may cough up mucus. This is a normal part of having CF.

Digestion

Some students with CF may need to go to the toilet more often and may spend longer in the toilet than other children as a result of general CF digestion issues. It is important to allow access to toilets during physical education classes.

Infection prevention

Colds and viruses can have more serious consequences for people with CF, leading to possible lung infections and hospitalisation. Allowing time for good hand hygiene and cleaning sports equipment, where possible, is the best way to minimise the spread of germs.

Cross infection

If there is more than one person with CF in the school community, it is also important to consider cross infection risks during physical education and related activities. The environment in the lungs creates a perfect breeding ground for bacteria to grow. These bacteria can spread to other people with CF by coughing, sneezing or touching a contaminated surface. This is known as cross infection.

For this reason, people with CF should avoid close or prolonged contact with each other and endeavour to maintain a distance of 4m apart, particularly in small, enclosed spaces. They shouldn't be placed in the same physical education classes, factions/house group or teams. Provisions should also be made for people with CF to maintain a safe distance from each other in shared spaces, on buses (e.g. swimming lessons, interschool events) and at events such as sports carnivals.

More information

For more information about CF, we have free eLearning modules as well as other resources available on our [CFSmart website](https://www.cfwa.org.au/cf-smart).