

Infection Control in Schools

Common Germs and Viruses

The thick, sticky mucus that builds up in the lungs of a person with cystic fibrosis (CF), provides a perfect environment for germs to thrive and multiply. Viruses such as the flu, colds, whooping cough, gastro and chicken pox can have severe and lasting effects on the lungs of a child with CF.

Although germs are everywhere and can't always be avoided, good infection control programs within schools can significantly lower infection rates. Good infection control practices in schools include:

- A strong school policy about parents not bringing unwell children to school is implemented.
- Students have access to soap and paper towels.
- Students are encouraged to use antibacterial hand gel appropriately such as after blowing their nose.
- Students are taught good hygiene practices, such as hand washing and coughing and sneezing into their elbow or sleeve.
- Students are taught about germs as part of the learning program.
- Keeping the child with CF away from other children who appear to be sick.
- Avoiding children sharing eating utensils, cups or water bottles.

Environmental Bacteria

There are also bacteria found naturally in the environment, which don't pose a risk to normal, healthy lungs, however, can cause serious damage to the lungs of children with CF. Once contracted, these bacteria can be difficult to treat and eradicate. Examples include *Pseudomonas* and *Burkholderia Cepacia*. They are commonly found in stagnant water, mould, and soils.

Environmental risks to consider in the school environment, include:

- Water play/water toys with holes in them- these can contain stagnant water and/or mould.

- Excursions- consider the environment. Farms with hay or areas with lakes or ponds can pose a risk.
- Swimming pool change rooms- these can contain stagnant water.
- Gardening- soil can pose a risk. Often short periods of exposure are ok, or a face mask can be useful.
- Air-conditioners- should be serviced on an annual basis to reduce the risk of harmful bacteria.
- Fish tanks- these can contain stagnant water and/or mould. They should be kept clean and have a cover on them.

School activities which can pose a risk to a child with CF should be discussed with the child's parents beforehand, as their involvement should be at the parent's discretion.

Cross-infection Among People with CF

If someone with CF has contracted a harmful bacteria, they can pass them on to others with CF, via both direct (touch) and indirect contact (surfaces, sneezing). For this reason, people with CF should not come within 4 metres of one another. There should never be more than one child with CF in a classroom. More than one child with CF in a school can be managed, however parents will need to be informed if this is the case. People with CF should avoid:

- Shaking hands, hugging or kissing
- Sharing common objects like pens, toys and computers
- Being together in enclosed or poorly ventilated places like cars

Useful Resources

- CFSmart www.cfsmart.org
- Common Infections Factsheet
<https://www.cfw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CF-Fact-Common-Infections.pdf>
- Pseudomonas Factsheet <https://www.cfw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CF-Fact-Pseudomonas.pdf>

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