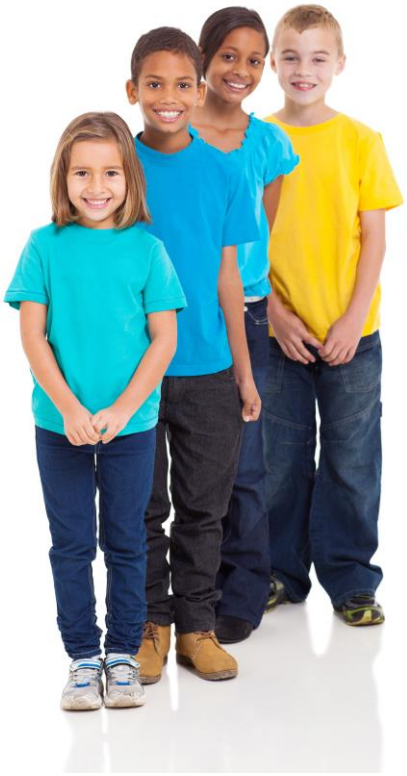
Cystic Fibrosis – Brief Information Guide

Saskatchewan Physiotherapy Association

What is Cystic Fibrosis (CF)?



Cystic fibrosis (CF) is the most common fatal-genetic disease in Canadian children, affecting an estimated 1 in every 3600 children. CF is a genetic disease caused by 2 abnormal copies of the CF gene, one from each parent.

CF causes thick mucus in the lungs, making it hard to breathe. Individuals with CF generally have a progressive loss of lung function due to persistent infection and destruction of lung tissue. Thick mucus blocks digestive enzymes from being released from the pancreas, preventing the digestion of food. This can cause malnutrition and delayed development.

Infection Control

Although people with CF may cough often, it is not contagious. However, those with CF cannot clear germs from their airways like others can, and this leads to frequent lung infections. Infection, in turn, causes mucus to be produced in the airspaces. People with CF already have excess mucus production in the lungs, so the added mucus can be very troublesome.

Proper infection control is important to ensure that people with CF remain as healthy as possible. Having students and staff wash their hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand gel is the easiest way to reduce the spread of germs. This includes before handling food and after coughing, sneezing, using the restroom, or using shared objects**. Regularly cleaning and disinfecting of shared objects and surfaces is another important way to reduce the spread of germs.** Having disinfecting sprays and/or wipes on hand at all times is an easy way to ensure cleaning can be done regularly.

Educating students, parents, and staff on the importance of staying home if they are sick is an important part of preventing spread of infection, both viral and bacterial, which can exacerbate CF. The need for extra health care visits, physiotherapy treatments, and hospital stays can be prevented through effective infection control. Healthy people with CF have less exhausting treatment sessions, which contributes to higher energy levels and an improved quality of life.

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For more information about Cystic Fibrosis visit www.cysticfibrosis.ca

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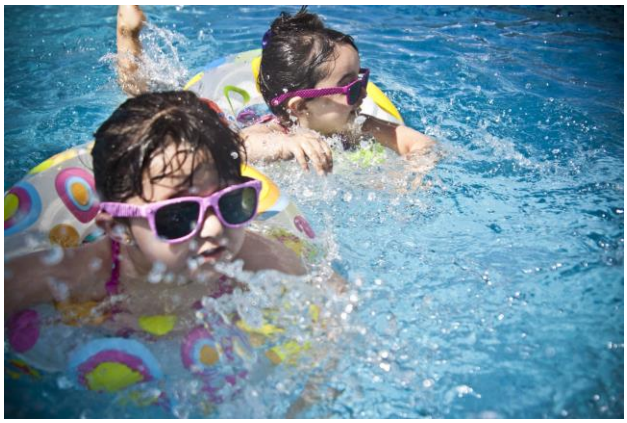
Unique Needs



Digestive difficulties

- Student may require frequent bathroom breaks

Frequent coughing

- Does not indicate illness as they are trying to clear mucus from their lungs
- The student may need to leave class

Fatigue

- Morning routines start earlier than other students
- The student may be tired or sleep during class

Increased caloric requirements

- May mean the student needs to eat during class

Individualized exercise requirements

- Students may require more frequent breaks due to shortness of breath or fatigue

Benefits of Physical Activity

People with CF can benefit from physical activity similar to other individuals by attaining health benefits such as an increase in general cardiovascular health. Additionally, exercise can benefit those with CF even more by:

- Increasing the ease of airway clearance associated with mucus buildup
- Improve lung function to make breathing easier
- Create a reserve that the body can use while the person is experiencing a lung infection

How Physiotherapists Can Help

Physiotherapists are primary members of the cystic fibrosis health care team. Their principle role in the treatment of cystic fibrosis is airway clearance in order to help prevent buildup of mucus in the lungs and prescribing safe and effective exercise programs. Airway clearance can be accomplished in a number of different ways, and generally involve several breathing techniques and/or chest vibration.

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