



Starting school or day care

With any child, it is normal to feel nervous about them starting school or day care. You might have questions about how to manage their treatments with the new school routine, how they will explain their medications to other children or have typical parental worries about how your child will manage a full school day. Just know that children with CF can still participate in every activity at school or day care.

It is important to remember that children often pick up on the emotions and attitudes of their parents, so if you show that you are stressed about school or childcare, your child may become stressed too. That means, calm parent = calmer child.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Changes to routine

Alongside the transition to school, there are likely to be many changes to your and your child's daily routine. The changes to, and differences between, your weekday and weekend routines may seem difficult. To help, there is a '*CF Jobs Timetable*' available [here](#) to help you plan out your weekly routines, including CF treatments. If you need any help structuring your daily or weekly routines with this new transition to school, please speak to your QCH CF team or Occupational Therapist.

Choosing a daycare

You may consider your child's condition when choosing a daycare environment. It may be helpful to visit a few different daycares in the areas to review for cleanliness and procedures as well as meet with the director. If the daycare provides food, ask for a meal planner with fat content which can help you to work out your child's enzymes for the day. This way you can send your child to daycare with pre-measured enzymes in a pillbox which makes it easier for daycare staff to administer.

Education

Your child's participation at school may not look too different from their peers, but it is still important to make sure you have clear communication with the school and your child's teacher. As a parent, you are the expert of your child, so you can consider how you feel comfortable discussing your child's needs.

1. Informing teachers

Lots of children at school have health conditions, such as diabetes, allergies or epilepsy, so your child will not be alone. However, it is still important for your child's teacher to have a good understanding of your child's requirements. Here is some information you may want to cover with your child's teacher:

- **Information about CF and how it impacts school/ home life.** It may also be helpful to let your child's teacher know about the treatment demands your child completes at home.



- **Coughing:** It is important that children with CF cough often and spit out what they cough up to help clear mucus from their lungs. It may be helpful for your child to have tissues nearby. Also, the teacher may need to inform other children that the cough is not contagious.
- **Calories:** Children with CF need more calories compared to other children, which is why their lunchboxes may not contain the typically 'healthy' foods. This should be considered if commenting on lunch foods or teaching the class about healthy eating.
- **Medication:** Your child will need to take their enzyme medication during mealtimes to help nutrient absorption. Teachers should ensure that your child is taking medication as needed. It is important to note that enzymes don't have harmful effects if taken by other children, so there is likely no risk to others if your child's medication is kept in their school bag or lunch box.
- **Toilet breaks:** People with CF can experience tummy aches, related to gas pains and diarrhoea. Speak with your child's teacher about allowing additional toilet breaks.
- **Infection control:** This is important to reduce the spread of germs and bacteria. Regular hand washing, taking care when sneezing/coughing/blowing noses, and not sharing food are simple ways that all children can help with infection control.
- **Absences:** Children with CF may be absent more due to admissions to hospital or sickness.

Health Care Plans: Some schools/daycares may request a health care plan for your child that your teacher can refer to as needed. You can utilise CF Smart resources (<https://cfsmart.org/>) to help you make your health care plan. As well as specific information about your child's CF treatment demands, your healthcare plan could also include information about requirements for hand hygiene, masks, sanitising, cleanliness, staying away when unwell, limiting contact and smaller size classroom requirements. Your health care plan won't include all possible scenarios so advise your school to speak with you if in doubt.

2. Informing peers

At this age, children are very curious. This means that your child's peers at school might ask your child questions about their CF, such as questions around coughing, taking medications, school absences, etc. Everyone has a preference for how much they'd like to share. However, there are a few things that parents can do to prepare their children and their peers prior to starting school.

When you discuss your child's needs with the classroom teacher, you may also discuss providing information to your child's classmates. (e.g. *"We will have a new student in our classroom next week called Jesse. Jesse has a health condition called cystic fibrosis. This means that Jesse will..."*). The teacher may be able to provide this information, or you may discuss resources/ assistance available through your CF nursing team.

Another strategy some parents have found useful has been preparing a PowerPoint presentation about CF for themselves or their child to present to the class. This would depend on your level of comfort with presenting to the class, the teacher's preference and the age of the children in the classroom. Examples of presentations can be provided by the QCH CF team.

Another key thing you can do is to prepare your child to answer questions that their peers may ask, which is explained below.



3. Informing your child

It is important to prepare your child for tricky questions their peers may ask. Some common questions they might need to answer include:

- What is cystic fibrosis?
- What their medication is for (enzymes)?
- Why they cough often?
- Why they do different things at home? (E.g. therapies)
- Infection control your child needs to complete while at school (e.g. washing hands)

Refer to the 'Educating your child about CF' section of this booklet for more pointers and tips.

For example, you could role play with your child by asking them a range of tricky questions to answer (e.g. "Why do you cough so much"). We have provided a range of sample questions and answers [here](#). Ask for QCH CF Occupational Therapist if you need any help with this.

Additional resources: Starting school or daycare

- Website: CF Smart : Resource developed for teachers to understand CF, includes e-learning packages, forums and guides. <https://cfsmart.org/>
- Book: *Taking Cystic Fibrosis to School* by Cynthia S. Henry (2000)
- Tips for starting school with CF:
 - <https://cfsmart.org/parents/early-childhood/>
 - <https://www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Caring-for-a-Child-With-CF/Parent-and-Guardian-Guidance/>
- Washing hands for infection control video:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-WVOBTW6iA>
- Information booklets for teachers:
 - Early Childhood Educators: <https://cfsmart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Early-childhood-teacher-information-booklet.pdf>
 - Primary School Teachers: <https://cfsmart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Teacher-information-booklet-for-primary-school.pdf>
- Ask your QCH Occupational Therapist and CF team for additional support:
 - PowerPoint presentations for your child to share about CF with their class/peers
 - Contact with school to discuss

