



Supporting children and students with diabetes in Ontario

Promoting child and student well-being is one of the four key goals in “Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario.” Ensuring the health and safety of children and students with medical conditions requires a partnership among families, members of the school community and community partners, including health care professionals.

Diabetes overview

Type 1 diabetes is a chronic condition where the pancreas stops producing insulin, a hormone that helps the body control the level of glucose (sugar) in your blood. The body produces glucose, and also gets it from foods that contain carbohydrates, such as bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, milk and fruit. Without insulin, glucose builds up in the blood instead of being used by your cells for energy. A lack of insulin can cause both short-term and long-term health problems. Symptoms of undiagnosed type 1 diabetes include:

- increased thirst
- increased urination
- a lack of energy
- weight loss

Type 1 diabetes occurs in about 1 in 300 children in Ontario. The cause of type 1 diabetes is not known. We do know that it is not caused by eating too much sugar, and it cannot be prevented. People with type 1 diabetes must receive insulin daily, either by injection or pump.

Type 2 diabetes can also affect children and youth, but it’s more common in adults. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not respond well to insulin, and the pancreas cannot produce enough insulin to compensate. Type 2 diabetes can often be managed through changes to diet and lifestyle, as well as with oral medications (pills). Some children with type 2 diabetes may need insulin injections.

Living with diabetes

Blood sugar levels change throughout the day, and are affected by everyday activities like eating, walking, playing sports and writing tests. A healthy pancreas automatically releases just the right amount of insulin to keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range. It constantly adjusts, minute to minute, responding to how much food we eat, activity, stress and other factors.



Giving insulin by injection or through a pump cannot match the precision of a healthy pancreas. No matter how closely people with type 1 diabetes manage the condition, they still experience swings in blood sugar levels. This is why it is important to check blood sugar several times a day.

- If blood sugar goes too low, a fast-acting sugar (like juice or candy) must be consumed to raise blood sugar. Low blood sugar (**hypoglycemia**) can be dangerous if it is not treated right away.
- If blood sugar goes too high, it causes thirst and frequent urination. If high blood sugar (**hyperglycemia**) is left untreated, it can become dangerously high. Children should always be allowed access to water and the bathroom.

Younger children may require hands-on support to help with daily tasks such as checking their blood sugar or administering insulin.

Creating an inclusive environment at school

All children with diabetes — no matter how independent they are — need the support of trusted, caring adults at school and elsewhere.

Children with diabetes can participate in all activities, but may need some advanced planning and additional monitoring. Ongoing communication between the school, the student and the family is essential when a student is diagnosed with diabetes and starts school. Maintaining an open exchange of information remains important throughout the school year, particularly when there are significant changes in diabetes care or school routines.

Families are encouraged to work with the school to create an individualized Plan of Care for their child. The plan will include support strategies or ways to accommodate the students so they can participate to their full potential in school activities.

The Ministry of Education expects all district school boards and school authorities in Ontario to develop and maintain policies to support students with asthma, anaphylaxis, diabetes and epilepsy in schools.

Emergencies

In the case of an emergency related to diabetes, school staff should refer to the child's individualized Plan of Care. This plan has information about the child's condition and emergency contacts.

If mild low blood sugar is not treated right away, it can become severe. A child with severe low blood sugar may be confused, uncooperative (unable/unwilling to take food or drink), unresponsive, unconscious or have a seizure. This is an emergency. It is important to act immediately.

In all emergency situations:

1. Stay calm.
2. Do not leave the student alone.
3. Dial 9-1-1.
4. Inform the emergency contact, as identified in the student's Plan of Care.

Where to find more information

Diabetes at School:

<http://www.diabetesatschool.ca/>

Healthy Schools, Ministry of Education:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/medicalconditions.html>

Developed in partnership with



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