

In Nova Scotia, over 1,000 children and youth under 19 years live with Type 1 Diabetes. School-aged children spend 30 to 35 hours a week—more than half their waking weekday hours—in school. That’s a long time to let your newly diagnosed child out of your sight, where he or she might roam free on a playground at recess, forget to check his or her blood sugar, toss half of his or her lunch into the garbage or be bullied for being “different.” It is the responsibility of parents and school personnel to foster an environment of better understanding of diabetes that supports children living with the disease.

Since the majority of these children live with Type 1 Diabetes, and require insulin by injection or by an insulin pump, the worry over who is going to supervise injections brings additional stress. There’s also the possibility of a child experiencing low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), which could turn into an emergency situation if it isn’t treated properly or quickly enough. Sometimes children with diabetes are stigmatized and left out of the full-school experience or placed in vulnerable circumstances.

Educating the educators—the Canadian Diabetes Association’s role

The best way parents can reduce their stress about how their children manage diabetes is to ensure school personnel are educated and informed. The Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA) has resources that can help parents, families, and schools. As well, the CDA National Advocacy Council of volunteers recently updated guidelines about the care of children with diabetes in schools, which recommends school boards have appropriately trained personnel to administer insulin and monitor children’s blood glucose levels, and monitor food intake and activity for students who are unable to perform these activities independently. “Some schools provide for a protective and supportive environment, but what we don’t have are consistent policies across the province or across the country, and that’s what we need,” says Joan King, the CDA’s outreach and individual advocacy manager.

How can school personnel help students with diabetes?

- *Participate in annual diabetes education, training and resource review to learn or to be reminded of how to manage diabetes, including emergency procedures for treating moderate to severe low or high blood sugar.*
- *Establish a formal communication system with all school personnel who interact with the student living with diabetes. This should include appointing at least one staff person to be a point-of-contact for the student and parent/guardian.*
- *Identify the student with diabetes to all school personnel, including volunteers, substitute teachers, student teachers, and support staff. With permission from the student and parent/guardian, some schools may choose to display identifying information*

in the staff room or office and/or have emergency information folders made available to all personnel. Medical alert stickers can also be placed on the student’s file to further identify the student.

- *Display posters identifying symptoms of high and low blood sugar in key locations throughout the school.*
- *Provide at least 24-hours notice whenever possible to parent/guardian of any change in school routine or upcoming special events.*



With files from Anne Bokma

For more information about CDA’s resources and the Guidelines for the Care of Students living with diabetes at School, please visit <http://www.diabetes.ca/kidsatschool> or contact the Nova Scotia regional office at (902) 453-4232.

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