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# Returning to School in the COVID-19 Era: **Section 504 Plan**

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The Safe at School Campaign of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) provides this series of recommendations and tips for parents/guardians in preparation for the return to school after nationwide school closures due to coronavirus. These recommendations seek to ensure a smooth transmission of safe diabetes management and care from home to school while recognizing the current reality of limited access to diabetes providers and other resources during the coronavirus pandemic.

**ADA's second recommendation** suggests provisions to include in your child's **Section 504** or other written accommodations plan to address COVID-19. Additional accommodations may be needed due to the pandemic. A student's legal rights have not changed with the pandemic. School staff and parents should work together to create a healthy, safe, and supportive learning environment for students with diabetes.

In addition, schools play an important role in preventing the spread of coronavirus to our communities. People with diabetes might be at higher risk for COVID-19 according to the CDC. Studies show that people with severe chronic illness of all ages are at a higher risk for the worsening of their chronic illness with the onset of COVID-19. While the science continues to evolve on the impact of COVID-19 on patients with chronic illness such as diabetes, it is important to implement added precautions for students with diabetes as they return to school.

- Make sure your child's school nurse has an updated **Diabetes Medical Management Plan** (DMMP)/provider orders on file for the 2020-2021 school year. Section 504 or other written accommodations plans should be consistent with the DMMP. See ADA's **first recommendation** addressing the development and transmission of the DMMP/provider orders.
- Contact the 504 Coordinator at your child's school to schedule a virtual or in-person meeting prior to the commencement of the school year to develop and/or update your child's Section 504 or written accommodations plan. Many times, the 504 Coordinator is the school principal, guidance counselor, a teacher, or other school staff member.
- Discuss your child's return to school with your child's provider to determine health and safety barriers, if any, to returning to the school building or, in the alternative, if digital and distance learning is an appropriate option for your child. If recommended by your child's diabetes provider, access to digital and distance learning should be included in your child's Section 504 or written accommodations plan. Obtain a note from your child's provider setting out recommended accommodations.
- In the event your child utilizes digital and distance learning, determine if regular virtual care visits from the school nurse or other school health consultant are appropriate. School nurses should provide community resources to families as needed to meet

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medication administration and other health care related needs.

- Schools cannot exclude a student from participating in a school-sponsored activity because of diabetes. Schools should consult with the student's provider and parent in making an individualized decision.
- Additional sick days should be permitted if needed.
- School staff should undergo coronavirus precaution training prior to the commencement of the school year. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and touch-free thermometers should be purchased by the school for use by the school nurse and other staff members who provide diabetes care to your child.
- Keep your child at home if sick or if other students have a transmittable illness placing your child at risk for contracting the illness.
- Healthy hygiene should be taught to students and staff and reinforced by your child's school.
- Schools should ensure that ventilation systems are regularly cleaned and operating properly.
- Schools should provide bag lunches and allow students to eat with their small group in the classroom or outside.
- Include precautionary measures in your child's Section 504 or written accommodations plan including, but not limited to: (1) small in-person class sizes; (2) same group of students rather than mixing between groups; (3) staggered, rotating and/or alternate day scheduling; (4) maintain at least 6 feet social distancing between desk and students and on the school bus; (5) stagger arrival and dismissal times; (6) prohibitions against sharing objects such as musical instruments and keyboards; (7) clean and disinfect desk, counters, door knobs, handles, light switches, electronics, metal/plastic playground equipment, drinking fountains, toilets, sinks, faucets, and other surfaces; (8) post signs throughout the school and make frequent announcements to promote handwashing and appropriate social distancing; (9) soap, water, and hand sanitizer should always be readily available; (10) encourage the wearing of cloth face coverings/masks – especially when social distancing is difficult; (11) stagger playground usage by classes; (12) provide an area of isolation or separate health clinic for students experiencing COVID-19, flu or other symptoms of illness; (13) provide a separate well-health clinic for medication and first aid; (14) limit activities where large groups of students are in close proximity and revise to a small group gathering; and (15) minimize mixing of students in the hallways and other common areas.

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- Encourage your child's school to not offer perfect attendance awards.
- A school nurse or school administrator should promptly notify a parent when another student or staff member is diagnosed with coronavirus, the flu, and another transmittable illness. Parents should consult with their child's provider to determine if their child should stay home. If the child stays home the school should provide access to digital and distance learning. The student should not be penalized for COVID-related absences and should have access to the same alternative education services as would be provided to any other student who is medically required to remain home under similar circumstances.
- In the event of a long-term school closure or dismissal, schools should provide a procedure for the return of unused medicine, equipment, supplies, and food to the family.