



Dos and don'ts for diabetes care during COVID-19

Legal protections for students with diabetes are not lifted during a global pandemic, said Crystal Woodward, director of the American Diabetes Association's Safe at School program.

"Students still have the rights, but we're going back to a whole new world," Woodward said, referring to the return to school. "Everyone needs to recognize that. We're all learning. It's changing every day. We all have to be flexible and open minded."

Keep the following dos and don'ts in mind for your students with diabetes during the pandemic.

- **Do arrange telehealth visits with nurse.** A typical provision in a Section 504 plan for a student with diabetes is to have a nurse or trained personnel available throughout the day and at school-sponsored events to provide needed care for the student in accordance with her medical management plan and physician's orders, Woodward said.

For students learning remotely this school year, parents can arrange regular or as-needed telehealth visits with the school nurse. If there is a concern or a need for medication administration or health care during the school day, then the family can work with the school nurse to identify resources in their local community, she said.

- **Do follow the CDC guidance.** School staff should receive training in COVID-19 safety precautions, Woodward said. Include provisions in the student's 504 plan to make sure the school is aligning with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as far as smaller classroom sizes, cleaning, mask-wearing, congregating in common areas, and traffic flow in hallways and other areas, she said.

Students with diabetes are at a greater risk for contracting the novel coronavirus, according to the CDC. Write a provision into the student's 504 plan that states the school is required to immediately notify the parent or guardian if another student or staff member has contracted COVID-19, Woodward said. "That should be an immediate notification," she said.

- **Don't exclude student from school sports.** Just because a student has diabetes doesn't mean he can't play organized sports during the epidemic, Woodward said. "One of the complaints we've heard from parents so far [is that] some of the athletes, because they have diabetes, aren't being allowed to play school sports," she said. "Individual assessment is required under 504 regulations so blanket bans against students with diabetes such as this may be in violation of federal law," Woodward said. "A student with diabetes shouldn't be told they can't be the varsity quarterback because their diabetes places them at a higher risk."

- **Do consider how student will receive routine care.** Think about how normal procedures may need to be modified, Woodward said. For example, a lot of times a student's 504 plan will specify that another student needs to walk the student with diabetes down to the nurse's office. Does the strategy need to be different now? Should the plan be rewritten so that a nurse, or another trained staff member, escorts the student instead?

The CDC guidance recommends having separate clinics for well and sick students. "Write separate well and sick clinics into the 504 plan," Woodward said. "There should be a separate well clinic set up for routine medication administration and health care. If a student is going to the clinic to receive diabetes care, they should continue to go to the clinic that is separate from where sick children and staff are seeking assistance," she said.

- **Do keep relevant provisions.** Even with in-home learning, students with diabetes should still be able to take tests at different times without penalty if they are ill or blood glucose levels are outside of target range. They also should still be allowed to be absent without penalty if they have an illness and have challenges with recovery due to diabetes. "Diabetes does make everything harder," Woodward said. "The student shouldn't be penalized for being tardy if they wake up with blood sugar outside of their target range and are late for logging on to class."

- **Don't force virtual learning.** Students cannot be forced into virtual learning just because they have diabetes, Woodward said. "We've seen that happen," she said. "It has to be based on individual assessment. The decision whether kids elect in-person or virtual options should be made by the parent along with the child's diabetes provider."

See also:

- [SmartStart: Students with Diabetes](#)
- [Meeting the Needs of Students with Diabetes: Eligibility, Accommodations and Participation](#) by Joseph L. Pfrommer, Esq.
- [Meeting the Needs of Students with Diabetes Under Section 504](#), a DirectSTEP[®] eLearning course from LRP Publications

For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [Return to School Roundup](#).

[Florence Simmons](#) covers Section 504, paraprofessionals, and transportation for LRP Publications.

August 28, 2020

Copyright 2020© LRP Publications



© LRP Publications. All Rights Reserved.