

Lupus Information Sheet

Lupus is a widespread and chronic autoimmune disease. It can affect many parts of the body, including the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels and brain.

The immune system normally protects the body against viruses, bacteria and other foreign materials. In an autoimmune disease like lupus, the immune system loses its ability to tell the difference between foreign substances and its own cells and tissue. When it makes antibodies directed against itself, the self-destruction causes inflammation and damages body tissues.

Researchers do not know what causes lupus, but they do know that it is not contagious. While scientists believe there is a genetic predisposition to the disease, it is known that environmental factors play a role in triggering the disease. Some of the factors that may trigger lupus include infections, antibiotics, ultraviolet light, extreme stress, certain drugs and hormones.

The incidence of lupus varies by location and ethnicity. The prevalence of lupus varies widely, ranging from four cases to 250 cases per 100,000. It is more prevalent among Native American, Asian, Latin American and African American patients.

Symptoms and Signs

- Joint ache or arthritis.
- Frequent fevers of more than 100°.
- Headaches.
- Prolonged or extreme fatigue.
- Skin rashes.
- Anemia.
- Pain in the chest on deep breathing (pleurisy).
- Sensitivity to sun.
- Purple fingers and toes from cold and stress.
- Seizures.
- Depression.

Treatment

There is no cure for lupus. Treatment approaches depend on the needs of the individual, including the organs involved and the severity of involvement.

Educational Implications

Students with lupus may experience extreme levels of fatigue, making participation in school difficult.

A student may have cognitive changes or learning difficulties due to factors such as depression, central nervous system (brain) involvement and medication side effects. Symptoms may include memory loss, lack of concentration, attention and awareness and a feeling of "being in a fog." This collection of symptoms, called cognitive dysfunction, may affect a student's ability to complete assignments in school.

In addition, students may experience issues with socialization and peer relationships.

Educational Options

Those students whose Lupus adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. IDEA entitles a student with a disability to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.