

# Adrenal Insufficiency

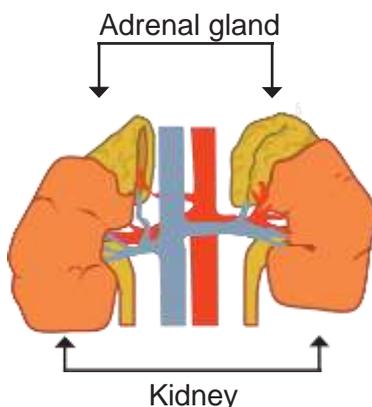
A guide for school nurses and teachers



We have written this leaflet to give schools more information about adrenal insufficiency in children. If you have any questions, please talk to the school doctor or nurse.

When we say child in this document we also mean young person.

## What is the adrenal gland?



There are two adrenal glands. They are small glands that lie just above each kidney. Each adrenal gland has an outer part (adrenal cortex) and an inner part (adrenal medulla). Cells in the adrenal glands make various hormones. The most important hormone we are interested in is cortisol.

Cortisol is a steroid hormone and is vital for health. It:

- helps the body respond to stress;
- helps to control blood pressure;
- helps to control normal blood-sugar levels; and
- helps to control the immune system.

## What is adrenal insufficiency?

For a number of reasons some children's adrenal glands may not work effectively. This results in adrenal insufficiency, or Addison's disease, where the adrenal glands do not produce enough cortisol.

Most of the time this will be controlled by steroid medication called hydrocortisone, which is taken by mouth.

If a child is ill or has an accident, it may affect their ability to take their medication. These situations, when severe, can lead to serious consequences for the child's health and they may need an emergency injection of hydrocortisone. The child will have an emergency kit kept in school.

**Note: You are not expected to give this injection. See the section on severe illness for further information.**

## What are the responsibilities of the child and their parent or carer?

The child and their parent or carer need to make sure of the following.

- The child is wearing or carrying a form of medical alert which shows they have adrenal insufficiency.
- They have provided the school with emergency hydrocortisone. (This should be in a box labelled as an emergency kit with a picture of the child on it and with a plan inside stating what to do. A picture guide on injection technique may also be helpful.)
- Their medication is in date and will not go out of date in the near future.
- They have completed a healthcare plan in line with school policy.

## **Parents and carers should tell staff:**

- if the child needs an increased dose of hydrocortisone during the school day.

**Please discuss any concerns or questions you might have about the child's or parent's responsibilities with the parent or carer.**

## **What are the responsibilities of the school?**

Adrenal insufficiency should not affect a child's day-to-day attendance at school. If any problems arise it would be during illness. Most of the time, the child will take their medication in line with local school policy. Please contact your local paediatric endocrine team on any issues related to medication.

## **Important points to note**

- Some children will be on daily steroid medication but others will only need it from time to time, for example if they are ill.
- When they are unwell, the child will need to take the medication two or three times a day (even with a mild illness). The child's parent or carer will supply the medication in line with school policy. Please contact the child's parent or carer if they become ill or for any other relevant incident.

# What if the child is unwell?

## Mild illness

A mild illness may include fever, a sore throat or a bad cold or the child may just feel generally unwell and off their food. The child should still be able to come to school. They may need to have a dose of hydrocortisone by mouth at school in line with the local policy for medication.

## Moderate illness

A moderate illness would include high fever (over 38.5oC), vomiting, flu or an upset tummy.

We would not expect the child to be at school.

However, if the child is at school and becomes unwell, you should contact their parent or carer to come to collect them.

## Severe illness or accident

If the child has a severe illness or has had a serious accident, broken a bone or had a significant injury which needs medical attention, they will need an intramuscular injection of hydrocortisone given into the thigh.

(A severe illness would include a vomiting bug where the child is unable to tolerate any fluids.)

If any of the above happens, you should tell the child's parent or carer as soon as possible.

If the child is ill or has an accident during the school day, during a

PE session or on a school trip, it is important that you act quickly. Phone 999, tell the operator what has happened and that the child has adrenal insufficiency and needs emergency hydrocortisone.

Have the hydrocortisone kit available and give it to the ambulance crew.

You are **not** expected to give this medication. (We can train school staff if we are asked, for example for trips to remote places.)

All children should have an emergency kit and care plan kept in school. It is the parent's or carer's responsibility to keep the kit stocked and to check medication expiry dates.

## Summary

### 1. Day to day

- The child may need medication at lunchtime.

### 2. Mild illness

- The child's medication may need to be increased
- They may need to take their medication at school

### 3. Moderate illness

- The child's medication will need to be increased
- They will not be at school while they are ill
- If they are at school and become unwell, contact their parent or carer.

#### 4. Severe illness or accident

**Emergency**

**Ambulance Needed**



**Phone 999**



**Emergency injection of hydrocortisone needed**



**Contact parent or carer**

**Nursing contact details:**

**Parent or carer contact details:**

This information leaflet was created in April 2013 by the nurses' sub-group of the Scottish Paediatric Endocrine Group (SPEG) Managed Clinical Network and will be reviewed in January 2022.

SPEG MCN is a network of health-care professionals in Scotland who have a particular interest in the care of children and young adults who have endocrine conditions.

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## For Further Information Contact:

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