

## 11 Common School Issues

### ISSUE #1: LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ABOUT PI

School staff and community may lack awareness of primary immunodeficiency diseases.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Learn about PI and share as much as possible with school personnel.
- Discuss school-related issues with a nurse at the student's immunologist's office.

### ISSUE #2: HANDLING SCHOOL ABSENCES

Children may miss school due to illness and IgG infusions.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Develop a plan up front so that the student, parents, and teachers understand what is expected.
- Take homework home for the child and, if necessary, locate a tutor.
- If the student is in a children's hospital, they may have a teacher on staff.

### ISSUE #3: CHANGE IN CHILD'S MEDICAL CONDITION

It's important to maintain ongoing communication, since children's symptoms and treatment for their primary immunodeficiency disease may change over time.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Parents and teachers should meet at least annually to document immunization status, current treatment, emergency contacts, and activity limitations.

### ISSUE #4: MISUNDERSTANDING AND FEAR THAT PI IS HIV

Educating the school community about primary immunodeficiency can prevent misconceptions, including the fear that the disease may be contagious.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- The child and parents will need to decide if they would like to disclose the illness.
- They should also be allowed to decide if they'd like to participate in teaching others about PI.

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### ISSUE #5: PREVENTING INFECTION

Because children with PI have weakened immune systems, they are likely to acquire infections when exposed to sick children.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Insure that all children wash their hands after using the restroom, sneezing, or coughing.
- Encourage parents to keep sick children home.
- Inform parents of children with PI when infectious diseases are prevalent in the class.
- Ask the parents of the child with PI if there are other precautions the class should observe.

### ISSUE #6: SIDE EFFECTS THAT MAY IMPACT ACADEMICS

Immunoglobulin (IgG) infusions have side effects (headaches, fatigue, backache, chills, nausea, vomiting, hives, fever)<sup>1</sup> that may impact the child's energy level, concentration, comfort, and academic performance. These side effects may last 2-3 days after infusion. Medication may be needed to alleviate them.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Notify the student's parents and school nurse of any side effects or changes in the child's behavior.
- Be aware of any medications the child needs to take at school.

### ISSUE #7: IMMUNIZATIONS

People with PI should not receive live vaccines such as MMR, oral polio, rotavirus, and varicella (chicken pox) because of the risk of contracting the disease.<sup>2</sup> Antibodies in IgG products may interfere with patient responses to live vaccine, such as those for measles, mumps, rubella, oral polio, rotavirus and varicella.<sup>2,3</sup>

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- The child's physician can provide documentation if vaccinations must be restricted.
- Parents will need to update school records to reflect changes in immunization status.

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### ISSUE #8: HANDLING MEDICATION USE IN SCHOOL

Children with primary immunodeficiency disease may need medication or treatments, such as an inhaler or nebulizer, during the school day.

#### **Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:**

- Become familiar with the child's medication(s), dosage and administration requirements.
- Provide a private place to administer medications to avoid embarrassment at being singled out.

### ISSUE #9: CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

Children may require modifications to the classroom environment and/or extra time for tutoring and missed schoolwork.

#### **Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:**

- Talk with the child and parents about options for missed schoolwork.
- Follow your school procedures for identifying children with learning problems.

### ISSUE #10: PREVENTING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

This is the most common issue school officials face related to children with chronic illness.

#### **Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:**

- Make sure you have an emergency plan in place for the student.
- Notify parents if the child is exposed to contagious diseases or experiences symptoms, such as high fever or difficulty breathing.

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### ISSUE #11: SUPPORTING GOOD SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF-ESTEEM

Your student with PI may be rejected by peers or develop low self-esteem.

#### Recommended Parent and Teacher Response:

- Support the child by not tolerating teasing by other students.
- Provide necessary accommodations, but emphasize similarities between children.
- Be respectful of your student's right to privacy about his/her condition.

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#### REFERENCES

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