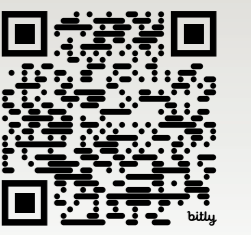


Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis

MISSING SCHOOL



Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are types of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that cause chronic inflammation of the digestive tract, leading to symptoms like diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fatigue, fever, and bleeding. These lifelong conditions have no cure and require ongoing treatment, often with significant side effects.



Health condition

- Diarrhoea (often urgent)
- Abdominal pain and cramps
- Blood in stools
- Fatigue and possible fever
- Nutrient deficiencies
- Affects entire body, including eyes, skin, joints, kidneys, liver
- Can cause slow growth and delayed puberty
- No cure. Treatments help manage symptoms but may cause significant side effects



Student population

Approximately **100,000** Australians have IBD

An estimated **8–10% of these** (about 8,000–10,000) are **under age 18**

Children and adolescents are increasingly being diagnosed, with many diagnoses occurring in teenage years



School absence patterns

- Absence pattern typically intermittent and indefinite in length
- Absences range from episodic (days/weeks at a time) to long-term (entire terms)
- Absences can be due to:
 - Pain, diarrhoea and urgency
 - Hospital admissions (surgeries, flare-ups, etc.)
 - Frequent medical appointments (specialists, medication infusions)
 - Fatigue and recovery periods



Challenges for students

- Toilet urgency (accident risk), ostomy care, fatigue, delayed growth
- Increased anxiety, mental health strain, catch-up stress, isolation
- Attention and concentration problems
- Delayed developmental skills from missed experiences
- Body image issues, scars, ostomy
- Disrupted friendships, difficulty reintegrating, hurtful comments
- Vulnerability due to immunosuppression and other stressors



Challenges for families

- Emotional toll of treatment uncertainty, side effects, and disease progression
- Concern for managing lifelong, incurable conditions
- Missed family time/pressures of treatment (including hospital stays)
- Siblings may feel overlooked, anxious, and have increased responsibilities
- Complex treatment plans, costs and vigorous advocacy



What schools should know

- Students may need urgent access to the toilet. Provide an IBD "toilet card" so they're never denied use and include access to disabled toilet for privacy
- Keep extra clothes at school to help prevent embarrassment from accidents
- Be sensitive and understanding, as IBD affects student's ability to socialise and participate in activities
- Coordinate with parents/health professionals to arrange an ILP with modifications (e.g., extended deadlines, extra rest, alternative activities when full participation isn't feasible)
- Show educational resources/videos to help peers, friends and teachers understand hidden disabilities and reduce stigma
- Use two-way technology and regular check-ins so prolonged absences don't lead to academic or social isolation
- Be aware of potential need for appropriate mental health support

"At school my peers have been doing everything without me. It felt like the world kept spinning without me. I came back and no one knew how to treat me. People are still trying to adapt to me being there, and my friends have built such strong relationships without me being there. It's really hard."



**Crohn's
& Colitis
Australia**

Crohn's & Colitis Australia

A not-for-profit organisation supporting Australians with IBD, offering advice, and services to ease the burden on individuals and families.

www.crohnsandcolitis.org.au