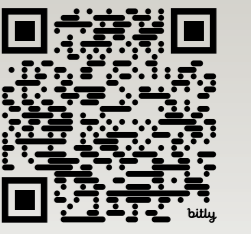


Immune Deficiencies



Immunodeficiencies weaken the immune system, leaving individuals more vulnerable to infections. These conditions encompass over 500 diseases, requiring regular treatments such as immunoglobulin therapy or bone marrow transplants. Often hidden, children may appear healthy but frequently miss school and face significant health challenges.



School absence patterns

- Students often miss significant amounts of school due to infections, treatments, preventative isolation, and hospitalisations
- Older students (Years 10-12) tend to have higher absence rates
- Absences can frequently exceed more than five days per term



Challenges for students

- Frequent infections and hospitalisations disrupt schooling
- Fatigue and illness make full participation in activities difficult
- Social isolation, stigma, and feeling misunderstood due to invisible nature of condition affects peer connections
- Infection risks limit social events, extracurricular activities, and sports
- Increased anxiety and emotional stress impact overall wellbeing



Challenges for families

- Treatment-related financial strain and loss of income if a parent reduces work
- Disrupted routines and reduced family activities balancing treatment schedules
- Challenges in accessing appropriate medical care, especially in rural and remote areas
- Siblings face less parental attention, emotional distress, and missed activities



What schools should know

- Children may appear healthy but be very sick
- Implement flexible attendance policies and offer remote learning options, such as two-way digital connections, to ensure continuity
- Use Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for adjustments such as quiet spaces, adjusted exam conditions, flexible start and end times due to fatigue, and additional support services
- Respect health privacy and student choice regarding condition disclosure, ensuring support without unnecessary exposure
- Educate staff and peers about condition (as appropriate) to foster a supportive environment, promote empathy, and reduce stigma
- Develop health and safety plans with hygiene practices and isolation protocols to minimise infection risks
- Encourage open communication between parents, teachers, and healthcare providers to address each student's unique needs and ensure coordinated support



Health condition

- Increased risk of recurring infections, including chest and sinus infections, pneumonia, skin or organ abscesses, thrush, earaches, septicaemia
- Low energy levels
- Severe Combined Immune Deficiency (SCID) is life-threatening without early diagnosis and treatment
- Regular treatment includes antibiotics, weekly/monthly immunoglobulin therapy and potentially bone marrow transplants



Student population

Numbers not specifically tracked

Estimated that **one in 5,000** people have an immune deficiency

Many people are not diagnosed or experience **delayed diagnosis**

No current national registry in Australia though efforts to establish one underway

"Because children look well, it's like having a hidden disability, because no one understands that they can often be very sick, that they often miss school as a result of that. And sometimes they have low energy levels, so they're not always able to participate in activities and sports that are on offer at school."



Immune Deficiencies Foundation Australia

A national not-for-profit and peak body providing education, advocacy, and awareness for Australians with primary or secondary immunodeficiencies.