Diabetes Information for Parents and Guardians

Understanding Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes in School-Age Children

Why you are receiving this information. North Carolina state law requires public schools to provide parents and legal guardians with information about Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes at the beginning of every school year. This handout summarizes key information and trusted resources for families.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects how the body regulates blood sugar (glucose), which the body uses for energy.

Type 1 Diabetes	Type 2 Diabetes
Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease. The immune system destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, so the body makes little or no insulin. It can develop at any age and is often diagnosed in children and teens. Diet and lifestyle habits do not cause Type 1 diabetes.	In Type 2 diabetes, the body does not use insulin normally (insulin resistance), and over time the pancreas may not make enough insulin to keep blood sugar in a healthy range. Type 2 is increasingly diagnosed in children and teens.

Warning Signs to Know

Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes can share many symptoms. Type 1 symptoms may appear more suddenly, while Type 2 symptoms can develop slowly or may not be noticed at first.

- Frequent urination or new/unexplained bed-wetting
- Increased thirst or hunger
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue or unusual tiredness
- Irritability or mood changes
- Blurry vision
- Frequent urinary tract or yeast infections

Additional signs can include: nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain with Type 1 diabetes; and slow-healing sores, darkened skin around the neck/armpits/groin, or numbness/tingling in the hands or feet with Type 2 diabetes.

Risk Factors

Type 1: Having a close family member with Type 1 diabetes can increase risk, but many people diagnosed with Type 1 have no known family history. Type 1 diabetes is not caused by diet or lifestyle.

Type 2: Risk can be higher with overweight, family history of Type 2 diabetes, low physical activity, prediabetes, and certain other health or demographic factors. Healthy eating and regular physical activity can help prevent or delay Type 2 diabetes in people at risk.

If you notice warning signs: Contact your child's primary care provider to discuss whether immediate screening for diabetes is appropriate.

How Diabetes is Screened and Diagnosed

A health care provider may use one or more blood tests to check blood sugar. Common tests include:

- A1C test – estimates average blood sugar over the past 2–3 months.
- Fasting blood sugar test – measures blood sugar after an overnight fast.
- Random blood sugar test – measures blood sugar at the time of testing.
- Glucose tolerance test – measures blood sugar before and after a glucose-containing drink.

When Type 1 diabetes is suspected, a provider may also test for diabetes-related autoantibodies and may check urine for ketones. Autoantibody testing can help identify early stages of Type 1 diabetes before symptoms become severe.

Stages of Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes can develop in stages based on the presence of autoantibodies, blood sugar levels, and whether symptoms are present. Type 2 diabetes may be preceded by prediabetes, when blood sugar is higher than normal but not yet in the diabetes range. A health care provider should interpret testing results and explain what they mean for your child.

If Your Child is Diagnosed

Talk with your child's primary care provider about a treatment plan. Depending on the type of diabetes, treatment may include insulin, other medications, blood sugar monitoring, nutrition guidance, physical activity, and ongoing support from a health care team. The CDC also recommends diabetes self-management education and support and, when appropriate, specialty care such as an endocrinologist or registered dietitian.

Support at School

Schools are required to assist students with diabetes in accordance with guidelines adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education pursuant to G.S. 115C-12(31). Families should communicate with the school about a student's diagnosis, treatment plan, medications, monitoring needs, and any accommodations or supports needed during the school day and school-sponsored activities. When suitable, students are encouraged to participate in self-management of their diabetes which may include glucose testing, using phone or sensor to keep track of glucose, administrating insulin, treating hypoglycemia with food/drink.

Trusted Resources for Families

CDC: Type 1 Diabetes
CDC: Type 2 Diabetes
CDC: Signs and Symptoms of Diabetes
CDC: Diabetes Testing
American Diabetes Association
NC Guide to Prevention and Management of Diabetes, 3rd Edition
Type 1 Diabetes Fact Sheet
Type 2 Diabetes Fact Sheet
Breakthrough JD1

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and American Diabetes Association, as listed above.

This handout is for educational purposes and is not a substitute for medical advice. Contact your child's health care provider with questions about symptoms, screening, diagnosis, or treatment.