

Back to school during COVID-19: Letter to parents and caregivers of children and youth with Sickle Cell Disease

Dear Caregiver,

The global COVID-19 pandemic has caused all of us significant worry. For families taking care of children with sickle cell disease, we know that the worry is even higher. Decisions around school attendance are complex and these decisions should align with your child's medical needs and your family's situation. Below you will find some guidance to some of the more common questions for children with sickle cell disease and school attendance that we have heard from families.

The guidance is based on what is currently understood around risks of COVID-19 infection in children with sickle cell disease, the current levels of infection in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and the social, developmental and academic benefits of attending school.

I've heard that children generally do well if they get COVID-19. How serious is a COVID-19 in a child with sickle cell disease?

We are still learning about the effects of COVID-19 on different groups of people but the information to date suggests that the majority of children and adolescents seem to handle COVID-19 infections well and only rarely develop serious complications. Unlike adults with sickle cell disease, current data indicates that children with sickle cell disease generally handle COVID-19 infections well.

As usual, you should bring your child to the nearest emergency department if they develop fever (38.5C or higher by mouth or 38C or higher under the arm), severe pain, difficulty breathing and/or if they look unwell.

Can my child with sickle cell disease attend school in person this fall? What about their siblings?

Based on the information that is currently available, we believe that children with sickle cell disease who were attending school or daycare in person prior to the COVID-19 pandemic should be safe to attend school in person. Children in this group should follow the COVID-19 related precautions that will be in place for all students in Ontario.

We also feel that if they do not have medical conditions that would prevent them from attending school, siblings of children with sickle cell disease should also be able to attend school in person. They should follow the precautions that will be in place for all students.

Should my child with sickle cell disease receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

The medical team from the CHEO Sickle Cell Disease Clinic recommends that all children with sickle cell disease should receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. Sickle cell disease weakens the immune system and we must do everything we can to keep your child safe.

What help can we get in making this decision?

As always, please contact your Sickle Cell Disease Clinic Team with any concerns that you may have and specifically around medical decision making for your child and school attendance.

We recognize the importance of families making the ultimate decision on school attendance based on the specifics of your child's medical care, your family's situation and your school. We will do our best to support you and your child during these uncertain times.

Sincerely,

Your CHEO Sickle Cell Disease Clinic Team

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