

Information for teachers who have children with congenital heart conditions in their class

This information is written in general terms, as congenital heart conditions will vary from child to child.

About half the children who have heart conditions will require surgery. Some surgery will be corrective but in complex cases surgery may only be palliative.

For advice regarding a specific child please contact the Cardiac Nurse Specialist on telephone 023 8079 4659. Please leave a message and they will ring you back.

Management

Some children will have undergone heart surgery in infancy. Other children with more complex conditions will require a series of operations over several years.

Most children with cardiac conditions will limit their own activity and there is no need to exclude them from sporting activities.

Children with more complex conditions are likely to tire more quickly than their peers. They may become breathless and their lips and skin may become blue. These children should be encouraged to join in all activities but allowed to rest when necessary. These children will not be able to manage competitive sports.

Some children may not tolerate the cold. So occasionally on very cold days they may need to be given the opportunity to stay in a warm place during a break and lunch time.

Some children especially those with cyanosis (low oxygen levels in the blood) may find it difficult to concentrate for long periods.



If the child takes warfarin, a blood thinning medication to prevent blood clots they must avoid all contact sports for example rugby or kick boxing.

If the child is due to have surgery it is important to maintain links during their hospital stay. Teachers and friends are welcome to visit especially close to discharge. This is particularly helpful in re-establishing contact with the school and provides an opportunity to catch up on school news and events.



After Surgery

It takes approximately six weeks for the breastbone to heal after cardiac surgery so the majority of children will not return to school before six weeks. Their return may be phased over a couple of weeks depending on the type of surgery they have had. They can gradually return to sporting activities but contact sports should be avoided for three months.

If a child has been in hospital for a long time, it might be difficult for them to return to school life and they may be traumatised from the hospital experience. If you have any concerns please discuss with the parents. The hospital does have a child psychology service.

What to do in Emergencies

Most children become gradually unwell, teachers might be the first to notice that the child is more breathless at play times or tired in class. It is important to report these symptoms to the child's parents so they can organise a doctor's review.

Children with heart conditions rarely collapse however if they did become suddenly unwell they should be treated like any other emergency and an ambulance should be called. It is important that the school has the details of the child's heart condition and name of their hospital consultant.

Please go to our website www.oceanward.co.uk for more information.