

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Reintegration to school

Going back to school after spinal cord injury is an important milestone. It can also be a stressful and anxious experience for both parents and children. There are some things to consider for children living with Spinal Cord Injury, as they move back into their school environment.

It is vital children and young people return to school as soon as recommended by their treating health team. It is a useful way to get back into a routine.

Discussions about returning to school should happen during the inpatient stay. Start talking to your children's hospital staff or the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service about the school environment to allow maximum planning time.

The school environment may not be perfect when the time comes for your child to return to school. To ensure a smooth transition back to school either the Children's hospital staff or the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service will:

Assess the accessibility of the school environment

Provide education to the educators and school staff

Provide education to your child's peer group.

Access and environment

There are various things that may need to be addressed when your child goes back to school. If needed you will receive support from the hospital treating team or NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service with the following:

Wheelchair and mobility access

Many of the newer schools are wheelchair accessible. Ideally the school should be on level ground. Things to think about might include: Will your child be included and independent in the playground? Is it flat or sloping? Can your child access the library and the canteen?

Toilet and bathroom access

Will your child be able to manage their personal care needs comfortably in this school environment? What is the access to the bathroom like? Will there be staff available to be trained or provide assistance for your child as needed? Can the school provide a safe and secure area for your child to keep any personal care supplies away from other children?

Classroom access

Is your child able to independently access the classrooms? What support is available in the classroom to assist your child's learning needs? Most state schools have a 20 student to 1 teacher ratio. Independent and religious schools may be different so be sure to ask.

Transport to school

How is your child going to get to school? Is it possible to access public transport? Is there a safe pick up and drop off area they will be able to physically access? If you are concerned about being unable to drive your child to school, ask about the Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP), your child may be eligible for this service through the Department of Education and Communities.

Equipment needed

Is the school willing and open to providing the recommended equipment by the Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, or nurse, to make your child's time in school safer and easier?

Communicating your family needs with the school

Open communication with the school is recommended. Some tips to consider:

- Inform the school of your child's health progress.
- Make it clear that you are keen to be involved.
- Be part of your child's individual education planning process.
- Supply the school with relevant documentation such as assessments, reports, etc.
- Advise them what your preferred management strategies are for siblings. (They are not the parents, and should be allowed to have their own place at school.)
- Share any particularly useful resources you use with school staff and advise them of the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service. The team are available to educate and support school staff.

What support is available?

- The NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service is available to visit potential schools (pre, primary and high) if you want assistance. The team can advise you on the specific school needs of your child.
- The NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service is a resource for schools if they need additional support and information about Spinal Cord Injury. The school can make direct contact.
- Peer support may be something you wish to explore for your child. Meeting another person living with Spinal Cord Injury who is older can help reduce fears of the unknown. You may like to talk to other parents who have a child living with Spinal Cord Injury also. The team can match you with a suitable peer if you are interested.

What can schools do to help?

Education staff have a key role in the successful return to school of children and young people living with Spinal Cord Injury. The following tips will assist with successful transition back into the school environment:

- Plan for active participation in classroom and on campus.
- Early preparation for excursions and camps.

- Behavioural expectations should be consistent with their peers.
- Focus on strengths and ability.
- Ask before helping – independence is critical for success.
- Adjust learning outcomes if required.
- Be creative in making adjustments and accommodations.
- Contact the NSW Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service or the child's hospital treating health team when required.

Further information about Spinal Cord Injury is available at:

- The Sydney Children's Hospital Network has a series of fact sheets about Spinal Cord Injury. www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets
- The Agency for Clinical Innovation have a series of fact sheets available under the Spinal Cord Injury tab: www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/consumer-resources

You can find more general information about transitioning to a school environment at:

The Raising Children Network:

www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/choosing_a_school.html

The Parents Council NSW:

www.parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au/announcements/choosing-a-school-for-your-swd-child