

Dear School Nurse:

As a critical part of a student's care team, we at the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) recognize the important role you play in supporting a student in your school or district presenting with the signs and symptoms of lupus. We are pleased to assist you in meeting your students' needs by providing you with two plans: Guidance to Caring for Students with Lupus (Care Plan) and Guidance to Independent Self-Care for Students with Lupus (Transition Plan). These plans were designed by ACR, in conjunction with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) with funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The care plans included in this package were designed by experts and tested with school nurses to provide support and care for students living with lupus.

About Lupus

Lupus is sometimes called "the great imitator" because the signs and symptoms vary and may mimic other diseases. As such, it is important to the well-being of your student with lupus to have a care team that understands his/her needs. Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE or lupus) is an inflammatory, multisystem, autoimmune disease that can be a mild disease, a severe and life-threatening illness or anything in between. The diversity of symptoms in lupus is great and all organ systems are vulnerable including the skin, joints, kidneys, lungs, and nervous system. About 20 percent of people with lupus develop the disease before 20 years of age and is more common in females from racial/ethnic minority groups. While the specific cause of SLE is not known, it is thought to be a combination of multiple factors, including the environment (e.g., a virus, sun, or drug reactions), hormones (puberty), and/or a genetic predisposition to have an overactive immune system.

Guidance to Caring for Students with Lupus (Care Plan)

When a parent or child learns of a diagnosis of lupus, it can be very frightening. However, by understanding the disease and working closely with the student's health care team to establish a customized Care Plan, you can help the student learn self-care, cope with the disease, and live a normal life. Learning about treatments, taking medications as prescribed, following up with doctor's appointments, and getting blood tests are very important to managing lupus. Children and teens with lupus should be encouraged to live as normal a life as possible. Our Care Plan provides guidance on supporting and caring for a student with lupus.

Guidance to Independent Self-Care for Students with Lupus (Transition Plan)

A Transition Plan helps you assist your students with lupus to make a smooth transition to independent management of their condition as they transition from child-centered care to adult health care. This means working with teens and young adults and their families to help them prepare for adult health care. Usually this change will occur between the ages of 18-22 with the process of preparing the child beginning as early as 14. You can help your students to get ready for adult care and to become more independent with their own health care by assisting them to learn to use the Transition Plan.

Given the criticality of continued care for persons with lupus, ACR wants to assist school nurses to support students, their families, and the student's health care team in caring for the student with lupus by providing these useful resources. For more information about lupus, please visit lupusinitiative.org.