

School Guide for Students with Transverse Myelitis

What is transverse myelitis?

Transverse myelitis (TM) is an uncommon neurological disorder caused by inflammation within the spinal cord. Attacks of inflammation can destroy myelin, the substance that covers nerve cell fibers. This damage causes nervous system scars that interrupt messages traveling between the spinal cord and the rest of the body. The location of the spinal cord damage determines which parts of the body are affected. Damage at one segment will affect function at that segment and segments below it.

Damage higher in the spinal cord is associated with a greater number of symptoms. The onset of TM may occur gradually within days or have a remarkably quick onset within hours. Most patients will have only one episode of transverse myelitis; a small percentage may have a recurrence. Most people who experience relapse have an underlying disorder.

How can transverse myelitis affect school performance?

The symptoms will vary depending on the area of the spinal cord affected.

- Weakness in the legs and/or arms
- Problems walking
- Generalized pain
- Sensory disturbances (touch, temperature, etc.)
- Bowel and/or bladder dysfunction
- Muscle spasms
- General feeling of discomfort
- Headache
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Respiratory problems (if that segment of the spinal cord is involved)
- Depression/Anxiety (in some cases)
- Cognitive and learning problems

How can schools assist students with transverse myelitis?

Academic

- Begin academic interventions under one of two laws : IDEA (Other Health Impairment) or Section 504 to provide appropriate accommodations
- Adjust schedule so that student does not miss core subjects due to therapy and/or doctor visits
- Provide notes prior to class, give tests orally; no grades or demerits for handwriting, if hands are affected.
- Allow extra time to complete assignments, if hands are affected.
- Accommodations for P.E. class
- Assess for PT/OT and technical assistance as soon as possible
- Use of a planner to help with organization and memory for assignments

Social/Emotional

- Inform any staff who works with student
- Provide counseling to address any social and emotional stress
- Communicate frequently among student, parents , school nurse, and medical team

Physical

- Consider an extra set of books (one for home and one for school).
- Consider having two lockers (one upstairs and one downstairs).
- Utilize an elevator pass and not the stairs, when legs are affected.
- Involve student in school activities, but with possible limitations.
- Allow extra travel time between classes, when legs are affected.
- Provide a permanent bathroom pass if bladder or bowels are affected.
- Provide a nurse pass whenever needed.
- Allow a change of clothes in case student becomes soiled.
- Schedule adaptive P.E. for students severely affected.

Resources:

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/transversemyelitis/detail_transversemyelitis.htm

www.answers.com/topic/transverse-myelitis

www.mayoclinic.com/health/transverse-myelitis/DS00854/DSECTION=symptoms

www.worldspecialists.org/pubs/transverse_myelitis.htm

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