

School Guide for Students with Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO)



What is Neuromyelitis Optica ?

Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO), also known as Devic’s Disease, is a rare disease of the central nervous system that affects the optic nerves and spinal cord. Individuals with NMO develop optic neuritis, which causes pain and vision loss in one or both eyes, and/or transverse myelitis, which causes weakness, numbness, and sometimes paralysis of the arms and/or legs, along with sensory disturbances and a loss of bowel and bladder control. The attacks lead to damage in the spinal cord and optic nerve. Such attacks occur when the body’s immune system reacts against its own cells in the central nervous system.

NMO is not contagious. It has no cure, but there are therapies to treat an attack while it is happening, to reduce symptoms, and to prevent relapses.

How can NMO affect School Performance?

All of the following symptoms may not occur in all cases; however, they are the most common problems associated with optic neuritis.

- Pain with eye movement
- Tender, sore eye
- Mild to severe decrease in central vision
- Dull, dim vision
- Reduced color perception
- Central blind spot
- Headache
- Nausea
- Decreased vision following exercise, hot bath or shower, or extreme heat
- Flashing lights (even with eyelid closed)

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

- Weakness of the legs or arms
- Problems walking
- Generalized pain
- Sensory disturbances (touch, temperature, etc.)
- Bowel and/or bladder dysfunction
- Muscle spasms
- General feeling of discomfort
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Respiratory problems
- Depression/Anxiety
- Cognitive and learning problems

How can schools assist students with NMO?

Each of the following should be individualized to meet the student's needs.

Academic:

- Start academic interventions right away under Section 504 or IDEA (Other Health Impairment)
- May need visual assessment for visual devices
- Assess for PT/OT and assistive technology as soon as possible
- Provide a hard copy (enlarged) of notes or recording device prior to class
- Have reading assignments on tape or enlarge written material
- Have student wear an eye patch (as directed by physician) when reading or on the computer to relieve symptoms
- Make schedule adjustments so that student does not miss core classes due to therapy or doctor visits
- Give tests orally
- Allow extra time to complete assignments
- Accommodations for physical education classes

Social/ Emotional

- Inform any staff who works with student
- Provide counseling to address any emotions or social stress
- Select a point person to address any concerns that may arise
- Have frequent communication among student, parents, school nurse and medical team

Physical

- Incorporate rest periods in student's schedule the first 4 weeks following illness or relapse
- Student may be involved in activities with possible limitations (i.e. preferential seating, low stadium seating)
- Consider student's needs when giving tests and projects
- Avoid extreme heat and activities that elevate body temperature (if the student has temperature sensitive issues).
- Provide an extra set of books (one for home and one for school)
- Utilize elevator pass if legs are affected
- Allow extra travel time between classes
- Permanent restroom pass if bladder or bowels are affected
- Nurse's pass whenever needed
- A change of clothes available in case student becomes soiled
- Adaptive P.E. may be needed if severely affected
- Provide two lockers (one upstairs and one downstairs)

Resources

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/neuromyelitis-optica> <http://www.devic.org.uk/>
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/neuromyelitis_optica.htm

School Services Department

Children's Health
Children's Medical Center
Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733
Plano Campus: 469-303-4670