

## Returning to school or day care for the child with cancer or a blood disorder

The Québec government has recently stated that primary school-aged children may return to school for the remainder of the academic year, that day-cares may open up, and that there will be a gradual opening of businesses in the coming weeks. While this is a stressful time for everyone, we understand it is particularly stressful for those with family members with chronic health issues. Thankfully, up till now, less than 3-5% of Covid-19 cases have been in children under 19 years old. The risk of serious illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) in children appears very low.

The four pediatric hematology/oncology centres in Quebec recently met to develop recommendations about sending children back to school or having household members return to work. The following recommendations are based on **current** knowledge about the state of COVID-19 in Québec and world experience of COVID-19 in patients with underlying diseases. These recommendations may change as the situation and knowledge evolves.

### Two general principles apply:

*If it is recommended that an affected child not go to school, the same recommendation holds for siblings going to school and parents leaving the home to work. That said, if it is opted that children go back to school or day care and parents must go to work, then it is critically important that the school/day care and work environments follow recognized procedures to minimize the chance of becoming infected.*

*If your child is in a group that may return to school, according to the Quebec government it is **not compulsory** for them or their siblings to return to school for the remainder of this school year.*

### Groups of patients that may return to school

The following groups of patients who are receiving or who have received chemotherapy and those who have had a transplant may return to school. These include:

- Patients with *acute lymphoblastic leukemia* who were going to school prior to the pandemic;
- Patients with *acute myeloid leukemia* who have completed therapy and had returned to school prior to the pandemic;
- Patients who have a *bone marrow transplant from another person* must meet all of the following conditions (some may not apply to your child): are off all medications for graft versus host disease (GvH) for at least 4 months, at least one year has passed since their transplant, are not on immunoglobulin support because of rituximab, and had already returned to school. If your child has persistent lung problems as a result of the transplant, they should not go back to school at this time.
- Patients who had a *transplant using their own cells* (autologous transplant), should be at least 6 months from their last transplant.



- Patients who have *completed therapy for solid tumours* and who had been at school prior to the pandemic;
- Patients who are currently on treatment but receive *low intensity chemotherapy* such as the following: Vinblastine only, vincristine only, vincristine and actinomycin for Wilms' tumour, vincristine and prednisone continuation phase for histiocytosis;
- Patients whose *cancer treatment did not involve chemotherapy* and have completed radiotherapy.

Patients who are regularly followed for benign blood problems:

- *Patients with ITP*, except those who may have had rituximab in the last year;
- *Patients with problems with red cells*: Hemolytic anemia not on high doses of prednisone, anemias (low hemoglobin) for any reason, patients receiving chronic red cell transfusions other than for sickle cell disease;
- *Isolated chronic neutropenias*;
- *Patients with problems causing bleeding* such as hemophilia, platelet disorders, and von Willebrands disease;
- *Patients who have a susceptibility to blood clots* may go to school except patients who have had a pulmonary embolism in the last year (see below).

#### **Groups of patients that should not return to school**

- Patients undergoing cancer treatment not described above;
- Patients with sickle cell anemia: in general, most children with *sickle cell disease* have not had serious problems with COVID-19 but there are concerns that this population can be particularly vulnerable to become seriously ill secondary to the virus. For this reason the four pediatric hematology centres in Quebec are currently recommending that patients with sickle cell anemia remain home for the remainder of the current school year. Recommendations will likely change as we learn more about how the virus affects patients with sickle cell disease;
- Patients undergoing *radiotherapy*;
- Patients who have had a *pulmonary embolism* in the last 12 months;
- *If your child is on some form of antibody treatment*, it is likely affecting the immune system in some fashion and it is recommended that they do not go to school at this time. Such drugs include:
  - Rituximab (Rituxan)
  - Eculizumab (Soliris, Eliziria)
  - Siltuximab (Sylvant)
  - Infliximab (Remicade)

If you think your child is on antibody therapy but don't see the name on this list contact your doctor or nurse.



- *Patients who are on long term immunosuppression with medications such as sirolimus, mycophenolate mofetil (MMF, Cellcept), tacrolimus (Prograf), cyclosporine (Neoral, Sandimmune) for reasons unrelated to a transplant:* it is uncertain whether you are more susceptible to a more serious COVID-19 infection. For this reason, we are recommending that you do not go to school for the remainder of this school year. We hope to know more by September 2020 when the new school year begins. Siblings may return to school and parents to work if they so choose.
- *Patients who have had their spleen removed or their spleen does not function:* it is uncertain whether you are more susceptible to a more serious COVID-19 infection. For this reason, we are recommending that your child does not go to school for the remainder of this school year. We hope to know more by September 2020 when the new school year begins. Siblings may return to school and parents to work if they so choose.

If your child is on a medication and you are uncertain if it potentially increases their risk for more serious complications from COVID-19, please ask your nurse or physician.