



## Supporting children and students with epilepsy in Ontario

Promoting child and student well-being is one of the four key goals in “Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario.” Ensuring the health and safety of children and students with medical conditions requires a partnership among families, members of the school community and community partners, including health care professionals.

### Epilepsy overview

Epilepsy results from sudden bursts of hyperactivity in the brain; this causes “seizures” which vary in form, strength, and frequency, depending on where in the brain abnormal activity is found. **Epilepsy is the diagnosis and seizures are the symptom.** If a person has two or more seizures that are not related to another condition, that person will be diagnosed as having epilepsy.

### Epilepsy facts

- Each year 15,500 Canadians are diagnosed as having epilepsy.
- Epilepsy affects over 300,000 Canadians and approximately 1 in 100 Canadian students.
- Seizures can range from a prolonged stare in which the student is fully aware, to a loss of awareness, physical convulsions, or the student’s whole body becoming stiff. While surgery is sometimes an option, the most common way of managing epilepsy is single or multiple drug therapies.

### Living with epilepsy

When managed effectively an individual with epilepsy can pursue a regular and productive life. Often times, the social anxiety and stigma around epilepsy is more detrimental to an individual’s quality of life than the physical symptoms of the condition. Some triggers for epilepsy include alcohol, unmanaged stress and environmental conditions (e.g., flashing lights). When avoiding these triggers, an individual should not be prevented from participating fully in any form of activity. With effective management and accommodation, living with epilepsy should not be a barrier to success.

### Creating an inclusive environment at school

All children with epilepsy — no matter how independent they are — need the support of trusted, caring adults at school and elsewhere.



Making children aware of different medical conditions is essential to creating an inclusive environment. Once a child is diagnosed with epilepsy, parents should explain to the child in simple language what the condition is and why it happens. Encouraging children and students to speak to their friends about their condition will help them to find support and understanding amongst their peers.

Ongoing communication between the school, the student and the family is essential when a student is diagnosed with epilepsy and is starting school. Maintaining an open exchange of information is also important throughout the school year, especially if there are changes to the student's medical condition.

Families should work with the school to create an individualized Plan of Care for their child. The plan will include support strategies or ways to accommodate student's so they can participate to their full potential in school activities.

The Ministry of Education expects all district school boards and school authorities in Ontario to develop and maintain policies to support students with asthma, anaphylaxis, diabetes, and epilepsy in schools.

## **Emergencies**

In the case of an emergency related to epilepsy, school staff should refer to the child's individualized Plan of Care. When an epileptic event is happening, it is important to stay calm and support the individual having the seizure. It is not essential to call 9-1-1 when someone is having a seizure; however, if the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes, or repeats without full recovery, seek medical assistance immediately. If you witness a student having a seizure, do not restrain the child, but try to move sharp and cornered objects away in order to prevent injury, and let the seizure run its course.

In all emergency situations:

1. Stay calm.
2. Dial 9-1-1.
3. Inform the student's emergency contact, as outlined in their Plan of Care.

## **Where to find more information**

**Epilepsy Ontario:**

<http://epilepsyontario.org/>

**Healthy Schools, Ministry of Education:**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/medicalconditions.html>