

# HEALTH CAPSULE:

## Caring for a Child with Diabetes

Caring for a child with diabetes can be a challenge. Families and early care and education staff need to know what to do. Diabetes affects 7% of the population. About one in 500 children has diabetes. Children with diabetes do not make enough insulin. The body needs insulin to use sugar in food for energy and growth. Insulin is a hormone that must be produced naturally by cells in the pancreas or be given as a medicine at proper times and in the right amounts.

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the body's immune system attacks the cells that make insulin. Most children with diabetes have this type. They must have insulin injections or use an insulin pump. Symptoms usually appear over a few days or weeks as sugar accumulates in their blood. They may be really thirsty, need to urinate very frequently, and be very hungry. They may lose weight and be unusually tired. Type 2 diabetes is more common in adults, often in those who are overweight. It is occurring more often in children now, most often in children who are obese. Diet or oral medication usually controls symptoms of Type 2 diabetes. Being overweight and having a family member with diabetes are risk factors for developing diabetes. Blood sugar tests determine the treatment for diabetes.

Too much insulin can cause low blood sugar. Family members and early care and education staff must watch children with diabetes who receive insulin for symptoms of low blood sugar. The symptoms include vomiting, being disoriented or distressed, or having a seizure. The child's diet, amount of insulin given, and frequency of blood tests must be adjusted to match the child's blood sugar and activity level. Staff should have a detailed care plan for the child from the child's health care provider. A child care health consultant can help the early care and education staff coordinate the child's care with the child's health care provider and family. If your program doesn't have a child care health consultant, contact ECELS 800-243-2357 / [ecels@paaap.org](mailto:ecels@paaap.org) or your PA Regional Key.

For more information about diabetes, see

- *Managing Children with Chronic Health Needs in Child Care and Schools*, 2010, available from the bookstore of the American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).
- National Diabetes Education Program's (NDEP) *Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel* <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-communication-programs/ndep/health-care-professionals/school-guide/Pages/publicationdetail.aspx>
- <http://www.jdrf.org/> Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation

Libby Ungvary, MEd

ECELS Director