

Study: Chronic illness may affect school readiness

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Children with a chronic illness may not be as ready to start school as their peers, according to a new study.

The findings led researchers to call for early intervention to provide support for these children.

“Our results support previous findings which suggest that chronic illness, in general, can interrupt the development of the skills children need for emotional, social and physical progress,” they said in the study “Chronic Illness and Developmental Vulnerability at School Entry” (Bell MF, et al. *Pediatrics*. April 13, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-2475>).

Researchers say children with chronic illness may need extra interventions before starting school.

While previous studies analyzed links between chronic illness and academic achievement, the team sought to look specifically at whether chronic illness impacts school readiness. Researchers studied data on 22,890 children in Australia, of whom 2,667 children had one diagnosed chronic illness before school entry and 212 had two or more diagnoses.

The most common illnesses they experienced were chronic otitis media followed by chronic respiratory disease and epilepsy.



To gauge school readiness, the team used scores from the Australian Early Development Census in which teachers completed a checklist of 104 items in five areas — social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical. Children who scored in the bottom 25% were deemed vulnerable/at risk.

Researchers found chronic illness was associated with increased vulnerability in all five areas in both the unadjusted model and one that was adjusted for socio-demographic characteristics.

Children with a chronic illness in the adjusted model were about 20% to 35% more likely to be vulnerable/at risk compared to peers without a chronic illness, results showed.

Increased risk did not appear to be disease-specific as chronic otitis media and respiratory disease produced similar impact. In addition, the difference in risk between one chronic illness and two or more illnesses was not significant.

“Although the increase in risk was generally small, the fact that these results are being seen at school entry, are pervasive across domains, and are likely to be additive over the child’s trajectory, suggests that early intervention is required to ensure that these children do not fall behind their peers as they progress through school,” researchers said.

Resource

- [Information for parents about chronic illness in children](#)

