

Supporting chronically ill kids in the classroom

April 15 2016, by Lisa Morrison, Sciencenetwork Wa



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Local teachers and parents should bear in mind that WA kids suffering from a chronic illness risk starting school while lagging behind their peers developmentally.

This is the finding of Telethon Kids Institute (TKI) and UWA research which found chronically ill children were up to 34 per cent less likely to be developed than healthy kids in a number of areas.

These delays covered general knowledge when they start school, being emotionally mature, socially adept, physically healthy and well, and general communication skills.

Ongoing, serious illness could have long-lasting impacts of a child's academic achievement, lead author and TKI researcher Megan Bell says.

"If [chronic illness](#) interrupts a young child's development, they may start school not ready to learn, and they will struggle to meet the demands of school," she says.

Ms Bell says students with reduced school readiness could find it difficult to catch up to their peers, and the impact could snowball throughout their education.

"Given that there is research showing that kids in later school with chronic illness are impacted by school absences and academic disengagement, we can predict that if these children remain chronically unwell," she says.

"Those kinds of factors will start to have an impact as well."

Middle ear infection, chronic respiratory disease and epilepsy were the three most common medical conditions which caused WA [kids](#) to be less developed when they reached school.

Ms Bell says no specific disease had a greater affect on development.

"Two children with the same diagnosis may not necessarily have the

same level of functioning," she says.

So it is important consider each kid's level of functioning rather than focusing on a specific diagnosis when it comes to deciding how best to help them, she says.

Approaching it holistically with doctors, teachers, allied health professionals and politicians is important, she says.

The researchers assessed the affect of chronic illness on a child's [school](#) readiness by analysing the results of the 2009 Australian Early Development Census.

The census measures children's development across the five areas as developmentally vulnerable, at risk or on track.

The researchers compared 22,890 AEDC records with hospital and WA Cancer Register data to determine children diagnosed with a chronic illness during early childhood.

More information: Chronic Illness and Developmental Vulnerability at School Entry. [pediatrics.aappublications.org ... 04/11/peds.2015-2475](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/.../04/11/peds.2015-2475)

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