

What are Other Health Impairments under IDEA

Introduction

Sometimes parents will get confused about what specific types of disorders are included under categories of disabilities. One of the more confusing areas for parents is Other Health Impaired. Many parents are not aware of the range of disorders that are included and this PTCH explains the basic that they will need to know.

Other Health Impairment" is one of the 14 categories of disability listed in our nation's special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, a child who has an "other health impairment" is very likely to be eligible for special services to help the child address his or her educational, developmental, and functional needs resulting from the disability.

IDEA's Definition of OHI

Before we launch into more about how to access special services to help a child with OHI, let's look at how IDEA defines "other health impairment." That definition, in combination with a state's policies, is a very important factor in whether a child is found eligible for services.

IDEA states that:

Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that—

(i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and

(ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance. [§300.8(c)(9)]

What's immediately clear from this definition is that there are quite a few disabilities and disorders that fall under the umbrella of "other health impairment." And those disabilities are *very* different from one another. This makes it difficult for us to summarize "other health impairment" and connect you with more information and guidance on the subject.

And that's why, in a moment, we will break this discussion down into closer looks at each of the disabilities listed: ADD or AD/HD, diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, and so on.

We'd also like to point out that IDEA's definition uses the phrase "such as..." That's significant. It means that the disabilities listed are not the only ones that may be considered when a child's eligibility for special services under IDEA is decided. A child with another health impairment (one not listed in IDEA's definition) may be found eligible for special services and assistance. What's central to all the disabilities falling under "Other Health Impairment" is that the child must have:

- limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic health problems; and
- an educational performance that is negatively affected as a result.

Special Help for Children

Two systems of help are available immediately to help eligible children with other health impairments. These divide out by age, as follows:

- **Early intervention services** are for children under the age of 3. Known as Part C of IDEA, the early intervention program exists in every state and includes free evaluation of the baby or toddler to see what the problem is, identifying the needs of the child (and family) based on the child's disability or developmental delay, and designing and delivering an individualized family service plan (IFSP) to address the child's unique needs.
- **Special education and related services** are for children from 3 to 21, sometimes older. These services include specially designed instruction and a wide range of supports to address the student's individual needs that result from his or her disability. Special education and related services are available to eligible children, free of charge, through the public school system. This includes a comprehensive and individual evaluation of the child to determine his or her eligibility, unique needs, and what types of services and supports are needed by the child to address those needs.
- **If your child has a health impairment, especially one listed in IDEA, you will want to find out all you can about these service systems.** They can be incredibly helpful for your child. A lot of info is available here on CPIR's website, so we won't repeat ourselves. Use the active links here or above to find out all but the kitchen sink about both early intervention and special education and related services.

Specific Health Impairments

OK. What disabilities does IDEA mention in its definition of Other Health Impairment? Examples include:

- ADD and AH/HD
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Heart conditions
- Hemophilia
- Lead poisoning
- Leukemia
- Nephritis
- Rheumatic fever
- Sickle cell anemia
- Tourette syndrome

Other Health Impairments Not Mentioned in IDEA's Definition

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, **other health impairments can also fall under the umbrella of IDEA's disability category besides the ones specifically mentioned in the law.** The U.S. Department of Education mentions specific other disorders or conditions that may, in combination with other factors, qualify a child for services under IDEA—for example:

- fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS),
- bipolar disorders,
- dysphagia,
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS), and
- other organic neurological disorders.

The reason these weren't specifically mentioned in IDEA's regulations? According to the Department:

...because these conditions are commonly understood to be health impairments...The list of acute or chronic health conditions in the definition of other health impairment is not exhaustive, but rather provides examples of problems that children have that could make them eligible for special education and related services under the category of other health impairment. (71 Fed. Reg. at 46550)

Note that the Department uses the phrase "could make them eligible"—**could**, not does. Other aspects (adversely affected educational performance, a child's evaluation results, state policies) are considered in determining eligibility for services under IDEA, not solely the existence of the disability or condition.

From Center for Parent Information Resources