



# Chronic Health Conditions

**C**hronic, long-term health conditions can affect children's cognitive and social development and their participation in school. Common chronic health conditions in Fijian children include diabetes, epilepsy, asthma and Rheumatic Heart Disease. Additionally, frequent or chronic ear infections can have serious impacts on schooling. In school, children need patience and understanding as they may be absent frequently and struggle to keep up.

Parents, caregivers, family, friends, community members and teachers need to try to understand the condition and how it can impact the child. It is also important to recognise other impacts on the family, such as financial issues and mental stress that can arise from caring for a child with a long-term illness.

Whenever you notice any changes in a child's health or physical appearance, visit your nearest health centre or consult your doctor.

## Common chronic health conditions in Fiji

**Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD)** is long-term damage to the heart caused by rheumatic fever. It affects nearly one child per classroom in Fiji. Rheumatic fever is a common infection that starts as a cough or sore throat. If left untreated, rheumatic fever can lead into RHD and require regular injections and health check-ups. It is

important to seek treatment for coughs and rheumatic fever to prevent RHD.

**Diabetes** occurs when a person's body cannot control its blood sugar level. The body will either make too much insulin, or cannot use the insulin in the body.

Diabetes is treatable in Fiji and if untreated, diabetes can result in vision difficulties and sometimes amputation of limbs.

**Asthma** is a common chronic lung disease that can have a significant impact on schooling. Asthma makes it difficult for a child to breathe, leading to symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. These symptoms can be exacerbated by triggers such as allergens, pollution, and respiratory infections. Asthma affects about 20% of Fijian school aged children.

**Chronic ear infections** are a frequent problem for Fijian children, affecting around one child in every classroom. When bacteria or viruses infect the middle ear, symptoms such as ear pain, fever and hearing loss can occur. If untreated, chronic ear infections can result in permanent ear damage, including hearing loss. Treatment is essential to prevent long-term complications and improve quality of life.

"All schools shall promote fair and equitable access to education for all learners with disabilities regardless of their gender, age, social status, economic background, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation and gender identity, or intersections between these factors."

(MoE, Special and Inclusive Education Policy)

"Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education."

(Fiji Constitution)

**Who can help?** Your nearest health centre, the hospital in your division and your community health worker. For more information on health conditions, refer to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services <https://www.health.gov.fj/treatments-conditions/>

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Please note that this document is for informational/education purposes only and does not replace medical advice.



Ministry of Education

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