

AUTOIMMUNE DISORDER: LUPUS

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

To help children who have been diagnosed with the autoimmune disorder of Lupus, it is imperative to first understand the 4 types, the myths, ways to combat them, some common treatments, and resources that can be of aid in the school setting.

SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS (SLE)⁷

SLE is the most common form of lupus—it's what most people mean when they refer to "lupus." Systemic lupus can be mild or severe. If SLE begins in childhood, it is known as childhood-onset SLE or cSLE. Approximately 10–20 percent of SLE cases begin in childhood. Most cases of SLE begin in adulthood, between the ages of 15–44.



CUTANEOUS LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS (CLE)⁷

CLE is a form of lupus is limited to the skin and can cause many types of rashes and lesions. There are three types of CLE – discoid lupus, subacute cutaneous lupus, and acute cutaneous lupus.



DRUG-INDUCED LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS⁷

This is one of the least common forms of lupus and is caused by certain medications. It is important to be aware of this because it can be distressing to have such a big change.

NEONATAL LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS⁷

Neonatal lupus is different from other types of lupus. It is a rare condition that affects infants of women who have lupus and is caused by antibodies from the mother acting upon the infant in the womb.



TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The treatment can vary based on the type of lupus the child has. Some of the most common ones include Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), antimalarial drugs, immunosuppressants, and biologics³. It is also important to remember that medications can impact someone very differently, especially after long-term use and puberty⁴. So students will need help with normalizing asking for help and signaling when they are having a flare-up.



COMMON MYTHS ABOUT LUPUS²

Myth: Lupus is a Form of Cancer²

Cancer occurs when mutant cells replicate out of control, taking over and killing healthy cells. Lupus has an entirely different mechanism of action. When you have lupus, your immune system attacks your healthy cells, mistaking them for pathogens.



Myth: You Can Catch Lupus from Someone else²

Lupus that affects your skin may cause rashes. But you can't catch lupus, even if you touch that rash. The rash isn't caused by a transmissible pathogen. It's caused by the person's immune system attacking their skin.

Myth: You Can Cure Lupus²

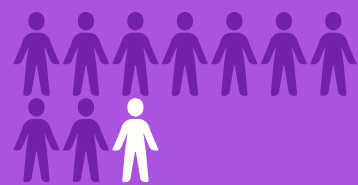
One can manage their lupus symptoms by finding triggers and making lifestyle changes to increase general health. Nobody has actually found a cure for lupus. In fact, researchers still aren't sure why and how the disease develops in certain people.

Myth: Only affects Women²

Women are nine times more likely to develop lupus than men are, but men aren't immune from this serious autoimmune disease. 5 million people around the world are impacted, mostly of color.

Myth: Lupus is like HIV/AIDS²

Although both lupus and HIV/AIDS affect the immune system, they work very differently. In lupus, the immune system is overactive and attacks the body's own healthy cells rather than harmful pathogens such as viruses.



1 out of 10 patients that have lupus are men²

National Resources

Lupus Foundation of America – <https://www.lupus.org/>
 Brigham and Women's Hospital, Mass General Brigham – <https://lupus.bwh.harvard.edu/community/community-resources/>
 National Association of Chronic Disease Directors – <https://chronicdisease.org/lupus/lupus-resources/>
 Lupus Research Alliance – <https://www.lupusresearch.org/>

LUPUS IN CHILDREN

What Can You Do in the Schools?



WHAT TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW

Lupus is a disease in which the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own tissues and healthy cells.¹ Lupus can affect almost any organ. Symptoms include: Joint or muscle pain, extreme fatigue, rashes, mouth ulcers, and hair loss.¹



IMPACT ON SCHOOL WORK

Due to a student's constant level of pain and/or hyper awareness of their disease, it can impact their cognitive ability, visual processing, complex problem-solving, and more⁵

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Create in-class activities to help students build communities^{7,8}
- Develop a system where students can signal when they need a break^{7,8}
- Ask the student how they want to participate in class when you notice a particular flare-up^{7,8}

PRIOR TO THE STUDENT ARRIVING...

- Read how the 504 (possibly an IEP) is written to ask questions⁶
- Check in with parents about the student regularly to stay up to date⁶
- Prepare worksheets and group activities to keep the students involved once the student is back⁶

IN SCHOOLS, IT CAN LOOK LIKE...

Difficulty remembering due to pain distractions, sensitivity to fluorescent lighting, missing school due to infections, or unable to participate in school activities of all kinds (in-class ones as well), absences.¹



TEACHERS, YOU CAN CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Teachers, it can be hard to develop a plan prior to, but you can start by looking at class activities that can be modified, worksheets that can be converted from written to virtual, and having low sensory input in classrooms. You can create these solutions into Tier 2 interventions afterward.



References

1. Assistance at school for children with lupus | Lupus Foundation of America. Lupus Foundation of America. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.lupus.org/resources/assistance-at-school-for-children-with-lupus>
2. Debunking common myths about lupus: Facts you need to know. Rheumatology Center of New Jersey. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.rhcnj.com/blog/debunking-common-myths-about-lupus-facts-you-need-to-know>
3. Lupus: Diagnosis and treatment. Mayo Clinic. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/lupus/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20365790>
4. Lupus medications. Johns Hopkins Lupus Center. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.hopkinslupus.org/lupus-treatment/lupus-medications/>
5. Moorthy LN, Peterson MG, Hassett A, Baratelli M, Lehman TJ. Impact of lupus on school attendance and performance. *Lupus*. 2010;19(5):620-627. doi:10.1177/0961203309355810
6. Resources. The Lupus Initiative. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://thelupusinitiative.org/patients-caregivers/resources/>
7. Types of lupus. Johns Hopkins Medicine. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/lupus/types-of-lupus>
8. Uzuner S, Sahin S, Durcan G, et al. The impact of peer victimization and psychological symptoms on quality of life in children and adolescents with systemic lupus erythematosus. *Clin Rheumatol*. 2017;36:1297-1304. doi:10.1007/s10067-017-3650-5

