

Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS) for teachers

What is Mast Cell Activation Syndrome?

Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS) is a condition which can develop in children or adults. Mast cells are part of the immune system and play a crucial role in defending the body against infections and other harmful substances. In people affected by MCAS, chemicals called mediators are released by their mast cells too frequently or abundantly, and/or in response to triggers that are not typically considered to be harmful, for example; foods or chemicals in the environment. This can lead to a wide range of symptoms that affect multiple parts of the body.

In MCAS, mast cells can be triggered by a wide range of stimuli, such as stress, food, medications, environmental factors, and even changes in temperature or humidity. This can cause a variety of symptoms, such as flushing, hives, swelling, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, headaches, and difficulty breathing. Symptoms can be mild or severe and vary from person to person.

You can find out more and download our free resources at www.mastcellaction.org

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Children with MCAS

Children with MCAS may experience symptoms that interfere with their ability to focus, participate in class activities, or attend school regularly. Some children may have mild symptoms, while others may experience severe symptoms that can impact their daily activities. Symptoms often fluctuate and flares of specific symptoms can continue for extended periods.

Children with MCAS may be taking multiple medications to support the medical management of their condition, these medicines may need to be taken during school time either regularly or as part of their rescue plan.

Children with MCAS may have to attend regular medical appointments and may need to rest at home when they are too unwell to attend school. This can lead to further disruption to their learning and supporting the child to catch up with any missed work can help to avoid any gaps in learning.

MCAS can also affect children's quality of life by limiting their ability to participate in physical activities, attend school regularly, and socialise with friends. It can also lead to anxiety and depression, as children may feel isolated or misunderstood due to their symptoms.



How can teachers help?

Teachers and school support staff can work with parents and healthcare providers to develop a plan for managing symptoms and accommodations that may be needed in the classroom, such as providing extra breaks, allowing for a special diet, or using environmental controls to reduce exposure to triggers.

It is important for those caring for a child with MCAS to be aware of the specific needs of children with MCAS and to work closely with the child and their parents to ensure that appropriate accommodations and support are in place to help manage symptoms and minimise disruptions to their learning.

It is essential that everyone caring for a child with MCAS has a good understanding of their condition and how to support their unique needs. Creating a plan to inform all staff including supply teachers and regularly keeping them up to date with any changes is vital to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment for children affected by MCAS.



Top tip for supporting a child with MCAS

Be understanding and empathetic: Understand that a child with MCAS may have good days and bad days, and their symptoms may vary. Be empathetic to their situation, and provide support as needed.

Provide a safe environment: Ensure that the classroom and school environment is safe for a child with MCAS. This can include avoiding the use of scented products or cleaning agents that can trigger symptoms.

Be aware of triggers: Be aware of the triggers that can cause symptoms in a child with MCAS, such as certain foods, chemicals, or environmental factors. If you notice that a child is experiencing symptoms, check if they have been exposed to any of their triggers.

Be flexible: Be flexible with work including homework and provide extra breaks if needed. This can help reduce stress and allow the child to manage their symptoms better.

Communicate with parents/carers and healthcare providers: Communicate with the child's parents and healthcare providers to get a better understanding of their condition and how you can support them in the classroom.

Prepare for school trips and residential: School trips can be a particularly worrying time for families. Creating specific risk assessments for individual trips with parents or carers can help to ensure the safest experience possible for the child.

