

Do all children with EE or EGID need an IHP, IEP, or 504 Plan?

Which one is right for my child? *By Lesley Bennett*

Today many school districts use a Section 504 Accommodation Plan (504 Plan), Individual Education Plan (IEP), or Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHP) to manage or ensure the safety of students with "Special Healthcare Needs", such as an EGID, in the classroom or during school activities. Figuring out which plan your child needs will depend on the severity of your child's EGID or EE. However, you should know that these school plans differ in the services and protections they can provide students. The IEP and 504 Plan are educational plans (mandated by federal laws) that focus on a student's academic performance and the educational/ related services or accommodations a student may need to stay in school and learn. The IHP is a school nursing care plan designed to address a student's special healthcare needs and the nursing interventions a student may need to stay in school or participate in school activities.

Unless your child's EE or EGID has been under control for a long time (or your child will not require nursing interventions at school), the National Association of School Nurses recommends that all children with EE or EGID (moderate to severe illness) should have an Individualized Healthcare Plan. This formal written document is prepared by a certified school nurse, or RN, with input from a child's parents, physicians, and the child (when appropriate). It is used in over 30 states, in addition to the traditional School Health Form, to protect students with special healthcare needs. The IHP clearly explains to a child's teacher, or school personnel, the student's healthcare needs such as medication requirements, frequent feedings, or life threatening allergies, and the impact a child's illness may have on his/her ability to learn. The IHP includes: a nursing assessment of a student's healthcare needs, nursing diagnoses, nursing interventions, Emergency Plan, emergency contact information, identifies school personnel who will implement the plan (and documents training), special food or nutritional requirements, identifies allergies or safety concerns, addresses student activities and transportation issues, and identifies all medical equipment, accommodations or modifications the student may need at school. The IHP can be a standalone document, or it can be included in an IEP or 504 Plan.

Whether your child needs an IEP or 504 Plan in addition to an IHP will depend on the severity of your child's EE or EGID and the eligibility criteria of your school district. If your child's EE or EGID is so severe that it impacts the ability to learn in school, your child may be eligible for an IEP and it is important to have your school district evaluate your child for this "Special Education" plan. There are strict disability requirements for an IEP defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA 2004), and eligibility is determined by your school district on a case-by-case basis. Basically if your child's EGID is so severe that it causes frequent, prolonged absences from school and your child requires homebound tutoring, your child's medication or nutrition affects the ability to concentrate and your child needs special educational instruction, or your child has another disability (such as ADHD, seizure disorder, food allergies, diabetes); your child may qualify for an IEP and access to special education and related services. The IEP provides your child with a number of protections under federal civil rights laws and IDEA 2004. If your child qualifies for an IEP, it is important to remember that the school district becomes legally responsible, under state and federal law, for providing any nursing

or healthcare services written into the GOALS section of the IEP or for an IHP included in an IEP.

If your child's EGID or EE does not impact the ability to learn but your child may need some extra help or support to access or even stay in school, your child may qualify for a 504 Plan under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. ADA and Section 504 are civil rights laws that require schools systems to make certain accommodations that will allow students with life altering disabilities (such as chronic illnesses) access to school. Although eligibility for this "Regular Education" plan will be decided by your school district on a case-by-case basis, criteria for a 504 Plan are less strict than an IEP and many children with EE or EGIDs may be eligible. Depending on the severity of your child's EE or EGID, a 504 Plan may provide your child with feeding accommodations in the classroom or on field trips, school transportation helps, assistance with medications or health-related needs, or even a special diet in the cafeteria. The 504 Plan will protect your child's civil rights in school but it does not provide your child with the federal protections of IDEA 2004 or entitle your child to special education services. If your child qualifies, it is important to include the IHP as one of the accommodations in your child's 504 Plan.