



## Guidelines for children with heart conditions participating in parkrun

### Congenital heart conditions

Congenital means 'from birth'. Congenital heart conditions are abnormalities of the heart that are present from birth.

In the UK, one in every 133 babies is born with a heart condition. There are many different heart conditions, some much more serious than others. Every child with a heart condition is different and will have different needs and abilities.

### parkrun

parkrun UK take place in parks weekly nationwide. The 5km events are on Saturdays at 0900 (0930 in Scotland) and 2km junior events take place on Sundays at 0900. Each event is managed by a team of volunteers and both participants and volunteers. Volunteers get a T-shirt after completing 25 volunteering opportunities, 5km participants get milestone T-shirts at 50, 100, 250 and 500 events (junior 5km runners also qualify for a 10 milestone T-shirt). Juniors doing the 2km events are rewarded with wrist bands denoting cumulative half marathon (21km), marathon (42km) and Ultra (72km) distances.

The parkrun events are runs not races and individuals run against themselves, the distance and the clock. Participation is via an athlete barcode generated free following registration on the parkrun website. After each event, the results are published showing athlete, time and position and cumulative number of runs.

Project PROVE is looking to make these events accessible and welcoming to those with disabilities and long-term conditions and to identify what changes if any are necessary to accommodate different groups.

*"My daughter aged seven has Hypoplastic Right Heart Syndrome, she has done junior Park Run a few times, we do take her wheelchair along so she can have rests when needed. I regularly volunteer and sometimes I'm the tail walker where she will join me at the back, she loves the cheers as she comes over the finish line! It is a fantastic weekly event that she can be included in as a family activity."*



A number of volunteer Champions have been recruited from within the parkrun family to work with various communities including: Heart Conditions, Endometriosis, Asthma, Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Dementia, learning difficulties and Obesity.



**All parkrun events have an AED (automated external defibrillator) onsite.**

### **Children with heart conditions taking part in parkrun**

Most children with heart conditions can join in with PE lessons at school and so can participate in parkrun.

Children with heart conditions benefit from exercise like any other child but they need to avoid contact sports, so parkrun is a good way for them to exercise safely. If parents are concerned for their child's welfare they can join in the run with them and enjoy exercising together. parkrun is something the whole family can be involved in, so children with heart conditions may run alongside their siblings.

As parkrun is not a race, participants can go at their own pace, jog or walk and can take a break if tired or breathless. The run doesn't finish until the last person crosses the finish line.

*"Our son regularly takes part in Junior Park run. He was born with aortic stenosis and now has a mechanical mitral valve and takes warfarin so we have struggled to find other sports clubs that he can join. When he first started we ran alongside him but he now takes part on his own. It's great to have something like this locally that the kids can keep active with."*



The parkruns take place in parkland surroundings and the organisers encourage people of all abilities to take part and are keen to extend that welcome to children and adults with heart conditions.

These guidelines address some of the concerns a parent of a child with a heart condition may have about parkrun. It also provides some guidance for parkrun organisers and volunteers to be aware of.

### **For parents**

If you have any concerns about whether it is advisable for your child taking part in parkrun then seek the advice of your child's cardiac nurse.

The questions and answers below should address your other concerns but for further information contact the event organiser at the parkrun you are considering joining.

#### **I am concerned my child won't take a break if they need to, can I run with them?**

It is compulsory for a parent or other adult to run with any children under 11 in the 5km run. All under 11s must be within arm's reach of a parent, guardian or other designated adult of the parents' choice at the 5k events. Parents are also welcomed to run alongside their child in the 2k junior parkrun.



### **I don't want to run but would like to be a spectator in case my child becomes unwell**

It is compulsory for a parent to be present at junior parkruns. Children under the age of 11 must be accompanied to/from the event by a responsible adult, and the responsible adult must remain in attendance for the duration of the event so there will be plenty of other adults attending and cheering their children on. If your child is over 11 you don't have to stay but are welcome to, maybe you could become a volunteer.

### **My child is a slow runner and/or needs to take breaks or walk some of the course, would that be a problem?**

Participation in parkrun should be for fun, children taking part should not feel under any pressure to perform. Children can run, jog, walk or a combination of all three, they can take breaks if they want to.

Slower runners are encouraged to start towards the back of the group especially if an adult is accompanying them.

However, junior parkruns are timed events. Only those aged between 4-14 years old and on foot (eg not those in a buggy or on the shoulders of an adult) can cross the finish line and be recorded in the results list.

### **I don't think my child will ever be able to run 2k can they still take part?**

If you think your child will never make the required distance but you would still like them to take part, then speak to the Event Director who may be able to make an exception given the circumstances. Examples of exceptions include those over 14 with special educational needs (SEN) or those with a registered disability, for whom social interaction and physical activity may be difficult but important.

### **My child is on anti-coagulant medicines so bruises easily, are they likely to get knocked by other runners?**

As stated previously you can protect your child by running with them, all parkrunners are encouraged to be considerate to the park and all other park users at all times. Spectators are told to keep clear of participants on the course and keep control of any children and dogs. You can time your start so you don't start in the middle of a large crowd, bicycles and scooters are banned from parkrun so there is no danger of collision. Care should be taken on uneven surfaces and participants should watch out for other park users, animals, vehicles, park maintenance work, trees, posts and other obstacles around the course.

parkrun is a good means of exercise for a child with a heart condition as it is non-contact and it is possible to avoid running in a large crowd.



**Can my child do parkrun in a wheelchair, I would like them to join in with their siblings but haven't the stamina for the course?**

Yes, buggies are allowed at 5K events, subject to course conditions. Buggies are also allowed at junior events, subject to course conditions, but only if the adult pushing the buggy is accompanying a junior runner.

Some courses are suitable for wheelchair users, it is worth contacting the event team in advance in order to discuss the accessibility and terrain of the course.

**My child is registered disabled can they still take part?**

Junior events are open and inclusive, disabled people may participate wherever it is safe for them to do so. Speak to the event team they will be able to provide course information so that you can make an informed decision about safe participation.

**Are there toilets?**

Not all events have convenient access to public toilets, check the course to make sure.

**My child has to take frequent breaks, I don't want them to come last.**

They won't come last. The Tail Walker stays right at the back of the field and should be the last person to cross the finish line ensuring that everyone is accounted for.

**My child with a heart condition is over 11, can they attend parkrun without an adult?**

You may leave a child over the age of 11 unattended at a parkrun event if you feel happy to do so. However it is advisable to speak to the event organizer and:

- Tell them about your child's heart condition and any potential problems
- Leave your contact details
- Give them a copy of the school Individual Healthcare Plan for your child if he/she has one.

**For parkrun organisers**

Most children with heart conditions can partake in sport and it is beneficial to them as exercise is to any child. You would probably not be aware of the fact they had a heart condition unless you were told.

It is unlikely that a child with a heart condition who is able to take part in parkrun would experience problems completing the run.



However, it is helpful to be aware of the following

**Breathlessness** – some children with heart conditions will have less oxygen in their blood than healthy children. This can cause them to become breathless more quickly.

Allow children to pace themselves, take breaks if they need them or to stop completely if necessary.

When children become breathless their lips and skin may take on a bluish tinge (cyanosis).

If any child becomes so breathless it is difficult to talk and or their lips have a blueish tinge then they need to rest.

- Try to calm them down as it can be frightening to be unable to breathe properly.
- Sit the child upright so the lungs can expand well.
- Encourage them to take slow breaths and breathe in a slow rhythm, this will make each breath more effective.
- Call the child's parents.
- If there is no improvement in their condition call an ambulance.

### **Tiredness**

Children with heart conditions may get tired more easily, they may need breaks or have to use a buggy for some of the course.

### **When to stop the activity**

If a child with a heart condition develops any of the following symptoms then they should **stop running or walking**, they will be aware of their own symptoms and will probably request to stop, they should **not be encouraged** to continue.

- dizziness or feeling faint
- becoming so breathless that it is difficult to speak
- palpitations (the heart feels like it is pounding, fluttering or beating irregularly)
- becoming very pale and clammy
- **severe** tiredness or fatigue

Call the child's parents.

If there is no improvement after resting, call an ambulance.

### **Extreme weather temperatures**

A child with a heart condition may find it more difficult to exercise in particularly hot or cold weather and may choose not to enter parkrun at these times. If they do enter be aware that they are more likely to show the above symptoms and call their parents or an ambulance if necessary.



## **Confidentiality**

- Older children and teenagers may not want others to know about their heart condition so try to be discreet if you need to discuss their condition.

## **Positive parkrun**

These guidelines are intended to encourage children and young people with heart conditions to participate in parkrun by anticipating possible problems so that they can be dealt with effectively. The chances of a child encountering a problem is very small.

People with heart conditions participate in a variety of sports, running marathons, snowboarding and playing cricket for example. Children with heart conditions do gymnastics, swimming and martial arts amongst many other sports.

Hopefully participating in parkrun will now be added to this list.

## **Further information**

If you require any additional information then please visit the homepage for the event you are interested in. 5km events can be accessed through <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/events/events/> and 2km events by visiting <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/events/juniorevents/>

If you cannot find the answers to your questions or need further information please contact Stuart Ainsworth ([stuart.ainsworth@parkrun.com](mailto:stuart.ainsworth@parkrun.com)) who is a Project PROVE Outreach Ambassador for people with Heart Conditions.

## **Evidence and sources of information for this CHF information sheet can be obtained at:**

<http://www.parkrun.com/>

[www.heartresearch.org.uk/chd](http://www.heartresearch.org.uk/chd)

## **About the Children's Heart Federation**

CHF is the leading UK children's heart charity and works with individuals and organizations concerned with children and young people with health and educational needs due to acquired or congenital heart conditions.

[www.chfed.org.uk](http://www.chfed.org.uk)