We receive many questions from families about the use of insulin pumps. An insulin pump is only one of the ways to manage diabetes and some families may wonder if it would work for them. There are medical criteria to meet before coverage is available. These coverage options need to be explored i.e private insurance or provincial program. With either option, there is a process to follow. The steps are outlined below.

Process for Children/Youth & Families asking about Insulin Pump Therapy

If you are wondering about insulin pump therapy to manage your diabetes, the following steps will help you determine if you meet the medical criteria for coverage through your private insurance or the Saskatchewan Insulin Pump Program. The provincial pump program is intended to cover those individuals, who despite managing the diabetes intensively, are not able to achieve target A1cs. There are other criteria as well. See criteria at Sask Health – search Sask Health – Insulin Pump Program.

Please note: It is the policy of this clinic that the physician who signs your forms, is responsible for your ongoing diabetes care. To work with the Pediatric Diabetes Team at Royal University Hospital, your forms will need to be approved and signed by Dr. Munier Nour, Pediatric Endocrinologist & the Diabetes Nurse with the team. If another physician signs, this clinic withdraws from care.

Step 1: Indication to the Pediatric Team that you want more information about Insulin Pump Therapy

Using insulin pump therapy involves many steps – becoming educated on it, discussing with the team whether it’s appropriate for your child & family and ultimately, whether the medical criteria to cover the cost is met. These steps will take months and are important to follow for pump safety reasons. All provincial programs follow this type of process.

Step 2: Insulin Pump Information Session – Eyes Wide Open

This is a mandatory (1 and ½ hour) group session offered 3-4 times/year in Saskatoon at LiveWell Diabetes program offices. The endocrinologist & nurse lead the session and your attendance is a requirement to progress to further steps in the Insulin Pump Therapy Assessment Process. It is a general discussion on the use of pumps as a method of insulin delivery. Topics include: observed benefits & challenges/pitfalls, what the literature shows, experiences with insulin pump use in this & other programs, ie A1c changes before & after, going into it with ‘eyes wide open’. If you would like to attend a session, please phone 306-655-2199 to register for the next session.

There are many other ways to learn about the insulin pump therapy choice however make sure you are hearing all sides. Please note that company sponsored information or insulin pump trainer sessions can provide helpful product specific information, but do not meet the criteria as a replacement for attendance to the Eyes Wide Open session.

Step 3: Assessment process

The typical assessment process will take 12 – 18 months however there are a number of variables that will alter this - the capacity of the Pediatric Diabetes Team for appointments, the urgency & whether the medical criteria for a pump is met etc. Beyond the medical criteria for the provincial pump program or criteria for insurance company, the team will want to see what skills you & your child/youth are
consistently & reliably demonstrating. Insulin Pump Therapy can be dangerous if some of these aspects are not occurring therefore it is our obligation to the children to ensure that they are.

Behavior, routines & skills criteria that need to be in place are:

- Checking blood sugars with recording a minimum of 4 times a day (before meals & bedtime), as evidenced by sufficient results in the meter and sustained over a minimum of 6 months. Also parents are involved in the record keeping and know what the results are
- Demonstrating accurate carbohydrate counting skills & eating awareness to actual carbohydrate
- Reliability shown with regular injections ie not missing injections now
- Demonstrating & practicing ongoing insulin adjustment based on blood glucose patterns
- Realistic expectations for what insulin pump therapy can and can’t offer
- Attending regular diabetes appointments & obtaining 4 A1c lab values per year
- Ongoing involvement of diabetes management support from parent(s) or legal guardians
- The parent or legal guardian being responsible for a pump management plan while the child is in the care of other individuals, schools or treatment centres
- Recognizing low blood sugar symptoms at Stage 1 & treating

These are the skills that need to be well rehearsed before an insulin pump is considered - for best insulin pump outcomes but also necessary skills to managing diabetes well even without a pump!

Step 4: Approval for Insulin Pump Therapy

Following determination by the team & physician that the above criteria is met, forms for either the Provincial Program or private insurance will need to be completed by the physician and nurse. Provincial forms are sent to the provincial SAIL program & pump company. An Insulin Pump Patient Responsibility Agreement will be reviewed & signed. These are sent approximately 2 weeks before the actual pump start. If your child/youth does not meet the criteria you will be given an ineligibility letter from the clinic explaining the reason. This process can be re-visited at any point, provided the criteria are met.

Step 5: Starting Insulin Pump Therapy

After approval, you are placed on a wait list to begin the training for the insulin pump. This can be up to a year+, depending on capacity of the diabetes team as insulin pump starts are not triaged as urgent. This is done through the Saskatoon clinic or for those in the south, MEDEC in Regina may be an option, depending on their capacity. At this point, you would need to choose a pump by doing your own research. Two to three individual learning sessions (1 – 2 hrs each) will be scheduled to learn how to use the insulin pump. Be prepared to do lots of pre-reading, practicing and doing overnight blood sugar checks and follow-up phone calls after starting.

Step 6: On-going follow-up

Routine diabetes follow-up continues through the Saskatoon clinic. Follow-up includes other aspects of diabetes care beyond insulin pump use ie surveillance for diabetes complications; changes required for growth etc. While this provincial program does not require an annual reassessment to ensure the pump is being used safely and the child continues to be a good candidate for insulin pump therapy, this will be discussed with the family and the team. There may be circumstances where insulin pump therapy would be discontinued in the best interests of the child. Examples are: blood sugar checks not being done, boluses missed, delayed set changes, carbs not counted, continual high A1c, lack of parental involvement, episodes of DKA etc.

If you are unsure of the steps of this process, please call your Pediatric Diabetes Team for more information.