

Recommendations for K-12 Schools During COVID-19

with School-Based Health Centers 2020-2021

Introduction

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) exist at the intersection of education and health and are the caulk that prevents children and adolescents from falling through the cracks. They are health clinics located on school grounds which provide care – primary health, oral health, mental health and counseling, family outreach, and chronic illness management – without concern for the student’s ability to pay and in a location that meets students where they are: at school. Over 260 SBHCs provide a point of access to care for more than 250,000 K-12 school-aged children across New York State. Visit nysbha.org for more information about SBHCs and the services we provide.

SBHCs are unique as the only providers of comprehensive care serving students in schools whose staff have also had direct experience addressing COVID-19 in New York State (NYS), within their sponsoring institutions, including testing and triage. Given what SBHC staff have experienced on both fronts, SBHC input is integral to the processes and protocols required to reopen and operate schools safely.

The **New York School-Based Health Alliance (NYSBHA)**, a membership and advocacy organization for SBHCs, convened a task force this summer to discuss the role of SBHCs in schools this year regarding COVID-19. **Recognizing this will be an ongoing process**, and in addition to current and broadly accepted standards – wear a mask, maintain six foot distance, wash hands and disinfect surfaces frequently, and optimize ventilation systems in public buildings – **we created a list of areas of consideration and recommendation for schools with SBHCs** as we all navigate this challenge; see below.

NYSBHA task force members have determined **three critical components integral to the provision of health care services by SBHCs** to students throughout the course of the pandemic:

- **SBHC staff and school administrators must develop and maintain a regular system of open communication to ensure classroom attendance, health care appointments and school and SBHC workflows are continually aligned**
- **SBHCs should not be utilized as COVID-19 isolation areas as this will significantly reduce the ability to address *all* other health care issues**
- **SBHCs must be able to provide regular care, including non-urgent oral health care, to students even as schools transition to and from periods of online-only learning throughout the school year**

We recognize that school districts across the state will require a diversity of plans to reopen and operate given how many variables are at play, NYS Department of Health (DOH) and the State Education Department (SED) guidelines and regional infection rates. NYSBHA's task force acknowledges our need to be flexible as we partner with our schools to provide students with a safe learning environment and vital health care services.

Recommendations

School Administrators as Partners

As stated above, NYSBHA believe the relationship between the SBHC, school staff/teachers/counselors and school administrators is key to the smooth, safe operation of schools this year. In addition to establishing a regular schedule of communication between the school and the SBHC, especially with regard to pupil attendance, we recommend that school security personnel, busing coordinators and front office staff be included in these meetings:

- o Schedule regular meetings throughout the school year to discuss current (and likely changing) policies and procedures for appointment-based and urgent care at SBHCs.
- o Create clear referral processes for sick students (those with and without COVID-19 symptoms). Review and update the plan on a regular basis to ensure the highest level of success in responding to and meeting the health care needs of the students.
- o Clearly define roles and responsibilities of SBHC staff and school support staff as they relate to addressing student needs and referral process (to clinic and outside resources).
- o Coordinate referral processes to SBHC and community resources to support student and staff needs.
- o Provide routine information/training to school staff on signs and symptoms of stress/trauma in students.
- o Work with schools to utilize time when students are back to school in person to maximize physicals and catch up on immunization needs

Non-COVID-19 Health Care

SBHCs provide a myriad of services to address physical, oral, and mental health issues on a regular basis. To provide these services, SBHCs need a safe, 'COVID-19 free' environment, separate from the space dedicated to virus screening and isolation. If the SBHC is selected as the default COVID-19 testing and isolation space, it will result in a significant reduction in all other health care we provide, including immunizations, well child visits, asthma care and reproductive health care. We strongly recommend the continued use of telehealth where available and appropriate, in addition to in-person services and also suggest the following:

- o Ensure routine screening for anxiety, depression, and substance use for patients in addition to physical health.
- o Implement screening for food insecurity and housing needs

- o Consider screening for other secondary health effects of COVID-19 such as unsafe home environment and general increased exposure to adverse childhood experiences, decreased physical activity
- o Deliver oral health education virtually with patient navigators or other staff
- o Distribute dental care kits at the SBHC, school, or food distribution sites that the school may host.
- o **Update your mental health crisis protocols to reflect any changes that have occurred due to COVID-19.**
- o Revise crisis procedures to include telehealth service needs as applicable.
- o Confirm navigation of services provided by SBHC and school staff and referral process
- o Revisit interdisciplinary meeting practices between school and SBHC staff to discuss and address student needs and support. Ensure process for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliance.

Screening & Isolation

SBHCs vary as much as the districts in which they operate. Some are large networks with multiple sites and more comprehensive services while others are smaller with fewer staff and limited physical space. Therefore, it is critical that schools and their SBHCs work together to determine the role SBHCs and their staff can play in screening and isolating students on a routine basis. We recommend the following practices:

- o Define roles and responsibilities of SBHC staff as they relate to the school's COVID-19 screening process on a school to school basis. Some SBHCs can provide regular staffing for this process, but others cannot.
- o Use of simple, phoned-based pre-screening apps by parents before students leave their homes where possible; some ask as few as three questions to determine if a test is recommended prior to returning to school in-person.
- o Telehealth is a good option, when available, for basic questions about the virus
- o Temperature screening of all students at the entry is not ideal for building flow, especially for larger student populations, and is not recommended by this task force.
- o Testing – how sick does the student need to be to get tested? A uniform determination should be in place so that all staff (school, SBHC) who will refer students for testing do so with the same set of guidelines.
- o If a rapid test becomes available, such as is available with influenza, SBHCs should revisit how testing can be offered safely and effectively to students

Provision of PPE

We recommend that SBHCs continue to provide protective gear to staff while conducting in-person care at SBHCs and schools provide PPE to any staff – school or SBHC – who work in the school’s COVID-19 screening and isolation areas.

Sharing Information and Resources with Schools and Families Checklist

- o Regularly check and revise communication plans with students and families.
- o Share what SBHCs screen for (and provide educationally – i.e., materials) with your school partners and families who may have a limited understanding of what SBHCS can offer to students at this challenging time
- o Share newsletters, mailings, social media posts, website announcements along with contact information.
- o Provide educational materials on loss, grief, and ways to cope with stress.
- o Coordinate school food programs for students with identified food insecurity.
- o Create resource current referral lists for teaching staff, students and families in collaboration with social workers, counselors, student support staff, nurses, CBOs and include mental health resources, food, housing, utility assistance, and employment support/workforce development.

Promoting Healthy Behaviors as Partners Checklist

- o Promote increased safety / sanitization measures the SBHC has adopted in coordination with school messaging. Ensure that school’s website includes information about SBHC including a link to enrollment information.
- o Promote telehealth services and how to access these.
- o Include SBHC updates and news in school communications (parent mailings, school newsletters, social media, website announcements, etc.).
- o Utilize sponsor and school social media platforms, texting, email, and communication platforms to broaden audience reach.
- o Increase SBHC staff visibility within the school to ensure that students are aware of the available services: teacher training, parent meetings (including virtual).

Resources

[CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019: Guidance for Dental Settings](#)

[CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019: Schools and Child Care Programs](#)

[CDC Vaccines & Immunizations](#)

[Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care: Guidance for Colorado's School-Based Health Centers During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[Kaiser Permanente: Planning for the next normal at school](#)

[National Association of School Nurses: Coronavirus Disease 2019 Resources](#)

[National Association of State Boards of Education Guidance](#)

[NYSDOH Dashboard for COVID-19 Data in Schools](#)

[NYSDOH Information on Novel Coronavirus for Healthcare Providers](#)

[NYSDOH Information on Novel Coronavirus: Reopening New York](#)

[NYS DOH School-Based Health Center Fact Sheet](#)

[NYS Office of Mental Health: COVID-19 Resources](#)

[NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities: Protecting the People We Support](#)

[NYSBHA: School-Based Health Center Reopening Guidance](#)

[NYSED Office of the Professions: COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#)

[School-Based Health Alliance: Hallways to Health](#)

[U. S. Department of Education: Protecting Student Privacy - FERPA and Virtual Learning](#)

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: COVID-19 Information for School Health Services](#)

Many thanks to our taskforce members and the Colorado School-Based Health Alliance for sharing their guidance with NYSBHA as we developed ours.