

Partnering with School-Based Health Centers: What Schools Need to Know

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) Frequently Asked Question

What is a School-Based Health Center?

A school-based health center (SBHC) is a doctor's office located in the school or on school property that provides a full range of health care services so students can avoid health-related absences and get support to succeed in the classroom. SBHCs are sponsored and operated by community-based health organizations, hospitals, and similar organizations; and adhere to state and federal laws, policies, procedures and professional standards for provision of medical and mental health care.

What are the benefits of SBHCs?

School-based health centers reduce barriers that have historically prevented youth from seeking the health services they need including accessibility, cost, transportation, concerns about confidentiality, and apprehension about discussing personal health problems. Since the SBHC is located on or near school property, students are able to receive health care services and return back to learning in their classrooms. Additionally, parents do not need to take time of work in order to transport the sick student to a doctor.

Who provides care at a SBHC?

Health care is generally provided by a nurse practitioner or physician assistant. A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse who has received advanced training and education to care for the general health of most individuals. A physician assistant has also received advanced training to provide health care to members of the community. Both nurse practitioners and physician assistants can prescribe most medications and are specially trained to address the comprehensive health of their patients. Behavioral health services are provided by a mental health provider such as a social worker, counselor, psychologist or psychiatric nurse practitioner.

What is the difference between SBHC staff and the school clinical staff (nurse, social worker, and psychologist)?

Both the SBHC and the school clinical staff have distinct roles and one does not replace the other. Each contributes to student health, academic outcomes, lifelong achievement, and overall student well-being. It is important to have clear written policies and procedures regarding role clarification, referral, and sharing of information between the SBHC and the school.

Do students need to have parental permission to visit the health center?

Parents or legal guardians must sign consent forms for their children to receive care. However, under Illinois law, all students can seek emergency medical care; diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; examination for physical or sexual abuse; and substance abuse counseling, confidentially and without parental consent. Counseling is provided to students receiving these services, including guidance in discussing health concerns with parents whenever appropriate.

Do SBHCs see members of the community?

Some SBHCs see members of the community and some only see students. This decision often depends on a range of factors, including, but not limited to: the type of sponsoring agency that operates the SBHC, the security arrangements in the school, the expressed needs of the school and local community. If your SBHC is open to the community, it is critical that arrangements are made to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of students. Often SBHCs have both an inside and an outside entrance.

Can students make appointments during class time?

SBHCs are focused on helping students stay in school and learn. Every effort is made in SBHCs to schedule appointments so that students do not miss core classes.

Is it mandatory for students to enroll in the SBHC?

Enrolling in the SBHC is not mandatory, however it is strongly encouraged so that all students may have access to quality comprehensive health care. Students enrolled in the SBHC can receive immunizations, comprehensive physical examinations (for sports, working papers and required school physicals), diagnosis and treatment of illnesses and injuries, prescriptions and medication. If a student is not enrolled, the only care that the SBHC can provide is emergency first aid and those services for which minors may consent to their own treatment.

How is a student enrolled in the SBHC?

To enroll in the SBHC, parents or legal guardians must complete and return a Parental Consent Form.

Does a student need to have health insurance to be seen at the SBHC?

SBHCs provide care to students whether or not they have insurance. SBHCs do bill private insurance and Medicaid for the services they provide when appropriate.

What if the student already has a doctor?

If a student already has a Primary Care Provider (PCP), then the SBHC staff will supplement the care that he or she provides. If necessary, the SBHC staff will communicate with the PCP to make sure that the student receives the best care possible both in and out of school.

Can school staff access care from a SBHC?

This depends on your SBHC. There are several issues that may impact this decision such as insurance and student privacy. However, in the event of an emergency the medical provider at the SBHC can respond to all persons in the building. School administrators are encouraged to involve the SBHC staff in their school safety plan and include them in their health and safety committees.

Are SBHCs funded by the District?

School-based health centers do not interfere with, or take money from, the schools' educational mission. The centers operate within schools, but are administered with staff and funds that are independent of the school.