

Leveraging Healthcare Partners in School Planning: COVID-19 and Beyond

As the 2021-22 academic year begins and the threat of COVID-19 persists, schools are, once again, tasked with ensuring the health and safety of students, staff, and volunteers, while also maintaining their focus on education. Healthcare providers can collaborate with school districts to support staff and administration implement federal, state, and local recommendations and share their own strategies for mitigating the spread of disease. This document provides recommendations for healthcare providers partnering with school districts during COVID-19 and beyond.

COVID Task Force

Schools continue to face a significant challenge remaining up to date with the ever-evolving circumstances associated with COVID-19 while still maintaining a focus on education. By establishing a COVID task force, healthcare providers can support schools in gathering and analyzing timely, accurate health-related information to make decisions to ensure the safety of students, staff, and volunteers. School districts may have established relationships with local health departments, community organizations and behavioral health providers that should also participate on the Task Force.

Medical Health Needs

Students, staff, volunteers, and caregivers may have been unable or hesitant to access medical health care services over the past year. Healthcare providers can work with school districts to:

- Keep existing school-based health center(s) (SBHC) open for students to:
 - continue preventive care (SBHC site to provide COVID Safety Plan for all sites)
 - maintain continuity of care for chronic conditions and acute needs
 - administer COVID testing
 - collaborate with school to co-host and advertise large immunization clinics
 - offer immunizations in the context of comprehensive appointments
- Develop a plan to ensure that, when a SBHC is not open, students and their caregivers know how to access their SBHC Medical Provider and/or other Community Medical Provider at an alternative site or via telehealth
- Leverage community and school-based mobile services to reach students that are experiencing difficulty accessing a healthcare facility. Co-locating mobile units with other partners providing resources (e.g. food distribution) can be helpful
- Create opportunities for SBHC and/or Community Medical Partners to host educational sessions (Zoom, School LMS platform, etc.) to interact with students, staff, volunteers and caregivers. Topics to consider: COVID FAQ, Immunizations, Healthy Eating, Sleep, Anxiety, etc.

Behavioral Health Needs

Many students struggle with shifts in emotions and discomfort with both old and new expectations. Integrated school-based behavioral health providers can assist in several ways:

- Offer telehealth services when in-person care is not an option
- Consult on strategies to prioritize social connection during quarantines, virtual learning, etc.
- Help identify and implement a universal prevention screening process for early identification of social-emotional challenges, ensuring alignment with school districts' PBIS efforts



- Provide education around strength-based approaches and positive reinforcement when implementing mask and handwashing expectations
- Provide additional training for staff around trauma-informed care, strength-based approaches, and behavior modification
- Provide resources and support to school staff and educators who have also been impacted emotionally and professionally by the pandemic.

Beyond COVID-19: School and Health Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships with schools are valuable to students, staff, and caregivers even beyond the additional support required amid the pandemic. Healthcare providers can continue to work with school districts to:

- Provide school and community educational health sessions (virtual and/or in-person)
- Work with local partners to perform school needs assessment to identify health concerns and partnership opportunities, even if a provider does not have a formal school-based health center or on-site behavioral health services
- Expand beyond a COVID-19 Taskforce to create school health taskforce(s) to assist schools in addressing students' ongoing needs with a whole child approach.

COVID-19: School Resources

- CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Guidance for School Re-Entry(updated 07/18/2021)
 - <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>
- Ohio Department of Education: Back to School 2021-2022
 - <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Back-to-School>

Beyond COVID-19: School Based-Health Resources

- Ohio School Based Health Alliance
 - <https://www.osbha.com/>
- Ohio Department of Education: School Based Health Care Support Toolkit
 - <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/School-Based-Health-Care-Support-Toolkit>
- School-Based Health Alliance
 - <https://www.sbh4all.org/>
- Center for School, Health and Education
 - <http://www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org/>
- National Center for School Mental Health
 - <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/>