

The School Health Care Area

The school health care area should be a place in the school where health needs are met in an effective and efficient manner. The health care area should be safe and welcoming to students, parents, staff and members of the community. Health care services provided in the school setting will vary somewhat depending on the needs of the student body and community. However, there are certain characteristics of a health care area in a school that should be reflected in all schools.

Basic hygiene is important in the school setting to prevent transmission of communicable diseases and to promote good health. This is even more important in the health care area, as this is where assessment and treatment of communicable diseases often begins. There should be a regular cleaning schedule for the school health care area, and there should be a procedure in place for cleaning surfaces or other potentially contaminated items after use for health care; this includes appropriate cleaning of items used for health screening (e.g. vision and hearing) purposes.

A toilet and sink should be available in or adjacent to the health care area. The adjacent toilet provides for student safety by allowing the school nurse or other staff member to monitor the ill student. Access to a sink with hot and cold water, soap and paper towels is necessary for the frequent hand washing done by persons providing health care services. At a minimum, the health care provider should wash his/her hands between each student visit and after handling any potentially contaminated tools or materials and cleaning supplies. In addition, having access to a sink in or adjacent to the health care area allows the school nurse or other staff member to observe the student during medication administration, to teach and observe for appropriate hand washing by students and is necessary for the cleaning of wounds during first aid. Having these facilities in or adjacent to the health care area, and in an area not used by the general school population, helps maintain privacy for the student and prevent communicable disease transmission.

The health care area in the school should include at least one cot and mattress with a waterproof cover. The cot and mattress should be available as needed for students to sit or recline on during assessment and treatment by the school nurse or other staff member, to provide a student a place to rest, or as a place for an ill student to lie down while waiting to be taken home by a parent or guardian. The surface needs to be waterproof for a variety of reasons. The first is that care for students may include liquids that might spill on the cot and mattress. Second, students may become incontinent

or vomit while in the school health care area. Finally, cleaning agents used on the cot and mattress between use by students are liquid. Thus, it is important not only to provide a cot with a mattress for students in the school health care area, but they must be waterproof in for the purposes of cleaning and infection control.

The school nurse or other school employee working in the school health care area must have access to a telephone and computer. The school nurse or other employee must be able to contact Emergency Medical Services without delay when necessary. The telephone and computer must be in or adjacent to the school health area so the school nurse or other employee can contact parents, guardians or other health care personnel, as well as record data electronically while still being able to observe students in the health care area. In addition, the telephone and computer must be located in an area where the school nurse or other staff member is ensured privacy when they are communicating with parents or guardians, other health care providers, children or other social services agencies or others regarding a student's private, personal health information. In addition, hard copy school health records must be maintained in a secure, locked location to ensure their confidentiality.

Medications administered by school personnel should be in a designated, locked storage place. The designated, locked storage area should be in the school health care area to ensure efficient use of staff time and safe, effective health care for the student. One exception is for medications that students are allowed to carry and self-administer. The second exception is for medications that must be refrigerated; such medications must be stored in a refrigerator in a place not commonly accessed by students. It is highly recommended that all school health care areas have a refrigerator not commonly accessed by students for medications, diabetic student snacks, ice, etc.

Additional supplies for the school health care area include a document reflecting current first aid practices. This document should be accessible to the school nurse and other employees when the school nurse is not available. An example of such a document is the Ohio Department of Health's *Emergency Guidelines for Schools, 3rd Edition*. A "sharps container" is a container made especially to hold contaminated or used equipment, such as insulin syringes and lancets, which could puncture the skin and transmit disease. Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations describe the requirements for a sharps container and its use (see references).

Finally, schools should be concerned about the exposure of students to heavy metals. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency recommends that schools be mercury free. In the school health care

area, that means thermometers and sphygmomanometers (for blood pressure measurement) containing mercury be disposed of properly and replaced with non-mercury instruments.

The school health care area in all schools should be a welcoming place where students can expect to receive appropriate care while in school. The recommendations described here are minimal requirements to ensure effective and efficient care for students in the school. The needs of each school should be evaluated to determine what other resources should be available in the school health care area.

References

Butlin, D. (July, 2000). *School Health Centers*; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities Publication.

This is a publication prepared by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Educational Design at the University of Virginia. It describes facilities required for all types of school health facilities, ranging from the minimal cot and first-aid station to a comprehensive clinic.

Ohio Department of Public Safety, Emergency Medical Services for Children, Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. (2001). *Emergency Guidelines for Schools*, 2nd Edition.

This publication provides guidance for school staff on how to manage a variety of emergency situations encountered in the schools.

Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (2004). *Developing a Community Mercury Reduction Program*.

This document provides guidance for communities and schools to reduce the environmental exposure to mercury.

Occupational Safety & Health Administration, US Department of Labor; *OSHA Regulations (Standards-29 CFR) Bloodborne pathogens-1910.1030*.

Provides guidance for all employers, including schools, in the prevention of transmission of bloodborne pathogens.

Occupational Safety & Health Administration, US Department of Labor; *OSHA Regulations (29 CFR) Medical services and first aid- 1910.151*.

Provides guidance for all employers, including schools, for the administration of first aid.

Ohio Revised Code 3313.713.

Outlines the requirements for school board policy for the administration of prescribed drugs by school employees.

Ohio School Facilities Commission. *Ohio School Design Manual* (2006).

The Ohio School Facilities Commission provides funding, management oversight and technical assistance to Ohio school districts for the construction and renovation of school facilities in order to create an appropriate learning environment for Ohio's school children. The Design Manual provides schools with standards of design and construction that assure a statewide standard of quality.

Selekman, J. (2006). *School Nursing: A Comprehensive Text*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co.

This book provides a wide overview of the history and current specialty practice of school nursing. It includes information about facilities, legal concern and the care of students and staff with acute and chronic illnesses.