

5 things you should know about school-based health centers



For over 30 years, Connecticut's school-based health centers (SBHCs) have been delivering comprehensive health care to students in the place where they spend 25 percent of their waking hours – school. Today, there are more than 100 school-based health centers in the state. The centers have become part of the safety net for children and teens, providing physical, mental, and oral health services to over 44,000 students every year in more than 30 communities.

Never heard of a school-based health center? Here are five things you should know.

1. School based health centers are not the same as the school nurse's office.

School-based health centers complement the work of school nurses by providing services for students in need of more complex care — such as treatment for illnesses and injuries, and behavioral or dental health care. Each school-based health center is a fully licensed primary care facility, staffed by teams of professionals specializing in child and adolescent health, including nurse practitioners or physician's assistants, clinical social workers, medical assistants, and oral health professionals, operating under the guidance of a medical director. They offer services including therapy, support groups for issues such as anger management and substance abuse, diagnosis and treatment of minor illnesses and injuries, management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma, and dental services.

2. Health care plays a big role in schools.

Being a kid can be stressful. Many children and teens deal with stressors including poverty, bullying, discrimination, anxiety, family financial stress, social media pressures, trauma, and unsafe neighborhoods. These stressors can lead to health issues that impact students' school performance. SBHC staff help students learn resilience and coping skills and allow them to develop relationships with trusted adults.

3. Having health care services in schools keeps students in class.

With a health center located in their school, students can get the medical care, mental health therapy, and dental care they need without leaving school and missing valuable class time. Studies have also shown that adolescents who use SBHCs for medical care have significantly increased attendance compared to students who don't use them. In addition, students who used SBHCs for mental health services had increased grade point averages compared to those who didn't.

4. School-based health centers support parents too.

Since children and most teens can't get around by themselves, being able to get health care in schools also makes a big difference for their parents. One parent whose son goes to his school's SBHC said, "If it were not for this center, I would have to pick him up and go to the emergency room each time, and without transportation. My son can attend more school because there is available care."

5. School-based health centers provide care to students regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

Many SBHCs partially rely on grant funding to help support their operations. Just as a doctor's office would, SBHCs will bill all insurances for medical or mental health visits. Invoices for co-pays and/or deductibles will be sent home following future scheduled visits. If your child is not currently under a health insurance plan, please notify the SBHC and an appointment will be made with the CIFC Financial Assistance Department to assist with enrollment in the CT HUSKY Insurance Program or be placed on a sliding-fee scale payment plan. Parents must give permission for their children to receive care from the health centers.

It is the mission of school-based health centers to work in partnership with parents, respecting the age, cultural values, and family situation of every student. A survey of 1,005 Connecticut students in grades 6 – 12 who use their SBHC show the value that these centers have on their lives.

- 75% agreed with the statement, "I have learned how to better manage my health issues/problems since coming to the SBHC."
- 70% agreed with the statement, "I have learned some new health habits through my visits to the SBHC."
- 65% agreed with the statement, "I have learned that some of the things I do may cause my health problems." Every child deserves a healthy future – and school-based health centers can help them get there.

As a student at Newtown Middle School (NMS), your child can take advantage of medical and mental health services offered during school hours, through the CIFC Health - School Based Health Center (SBHC). To take advantage of the SBHC services, please complete, sign and return the CIFC Health Intake form, Permission/Medical History Form and the Financial Agreement and Assignment of benefits form on the NMS website. Please call us with any questions at 203-270-6114.

Healthy kids make better learners