

What are school-based health centers?

School-based health centers (SBHCs) are doctor's offices located in a school or on school property. School-based health centers provide a full range of healthcare 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 or similar healthcare organizations. SBHCs adhere to state and federal laws, policies, procedures and professional standards for the provision of medical and behavioral health services.

SBHCs exist at the intersection of education and health. They are the caulk that prevents many children and adolescents from falling through the cracks. SBHCs provide primary healthcare, behavioral health services and counseling, family outreach and chronic illness management. A student's ability to pay does not impact the healthcare SBHCs provide.

Statistics show students perform better when they show up for class healthy and ready to learn. SBHCs ensure that kindergarteners through high schoolers can get a flu shot, have an annual physical, have their teeth examined, receive eye exams, or speak to a behavioral health counselor in a safe, nurturing place. SBHCs eliminate the barriers to healthcare access that many families face.

What are the benefits of SBHCs?

SBHCs decrease absenteeism, increase access to healthcare and improve health outcomes. Students and their families rely on school-based health centers to meet their needs for a full range of age-appropriate healthcare services, typically including:

- primary healthcare, immunizations, school physicals, sport physicals, sick visits and well-child checks
- asthma management
- behavioral health referrals
- nutritional counseling
- health education and promotion
- chronic disease management
- hypertension management
- medicaid application assistance

SBHCs counsel students on developing healthy lifestyle habits; how to prevent injury, and how to avoid violence and other threats. SBHCs emphasize prevention, early intervention and risk reduction.

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

The SBHC and the school clinic staff have distinct roles. One does not replace the other. Each contributes to students' health, academic outcomes, lifelong achievements, and overall well-being.

The school clinic staff is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school population's health. SBHCs provide primary healthcare, behavioral healthcare, and dental screenings and treatment. SBHCs prescribe and dispense medication, conduct clinical and lab tests and treat chronic illnesses.

Do students need to have parental permission to visit a SBHC?

Yes. Parents or legal guardians must sign consent forms for their children to receive care. Counseling is also provided to students receiving SBHCs services, including guidance on how to discuss health concerns with parents. However, under Georgia law, any student with signs of physical, sexual or substance abuse receives confidential counseling that doesn't require parental consent.

Is it mandatory for students to enroll in a SBHC?

Enrolling in a SBHC is not mandatory; however it is strongly encouraged so that all students can have access to quality comprehensive healthcare. The only care that a SBHC can provide if a students is not enrolled is emergency first aid and those services for which minors can consent to their own treatment.

How is a student enrolled in a SBHC?

To enroll in a SBHC, parents or legal guardians must complete and return the required registration forms.

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

SBHCs provide care to student whether or not they have insurance. SBHCs do accept private insurance and Medicaid for the services they provide.

What if a student already has a doctor?

The SBHC staff supplements care that the student's primary care physician (PCP) provides. If necessary, the SBHC staff will communicate with the student's PCP to make sure that the student receives the best care available both while attending and away from school.