



Interim Guidance: Role of the School Nurse in Return to School Planning

Disclaimer statement: This document is NOT a substitute for nursing judgment and does not dictate an exclusive course of action. State and district laws and policies should be followed. This document is based on current research available at the time of publishing. *Updated on 5/15/2020.*

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- Massachusetts School Nurse Organization
- Iowa Organization of School Nurses
- Greater Houston Area School Nurse Leaders.

The school nurse is an essential member on pandemic preparedness, re-opening and re-entry planning teams. School nurses are on the front lines of exposure to students who are sick or who are asymptomatic but infectious.

As a healthcare professional, school nurses are specialists in public health. The school nurse leads healthcare in schools and practices in a holistic manner to address the needs of students. Current standards of practice are evolving for the care of students during the COVID-19 pandemic and are threaded throughout this guidance document. School nurse leaders should be included in state and local level planning for schools opening.

- [Template letter to state and local leaders for inclusion of school nurses](#)
- [Template letter to school superintendents for inclusion of school nurses](#)

School nurses practice within the tenets of the *Framework for the 21st Century School Nursing Practice™* (NASN, 2016), through the principles of Leadership, Standards of Practice, Quality Improvement, Care Coordination, and Community/Public Health.

Leadership

1. Leadership is a priority as school nurses must be included in all aspects of the national, state, and local response. Requirements for re-entry are developing. Refer to most recent guidance from the following:
 - a. [CDC Guidance for Schools](#)
 - b. Consult with state school nurse consultants



- b. No longer has a fever without the use of fever reducing medication
- c. Other symptoms have improved such as cough and shortness of breath
- c. Advocacy
 - i. State level advocacy to consider provisional extensions of 2019-2020 health plans/medical orders, school physicals, and postponement/suspension of mandated state screenings.
 - 1. Priority should be given to maintaining immunization requirements. See AAP- [Planning Considerations: Return to in-person education in schools.](#)
 - 2. Partner with state school nurse consultants, state and local health departments, state departments of education, state government, healthcare systems, & American Academy of Pediatrics local Chapter.
 - a. [Interim Guidance on the Role of the State School Nurse Consultant—Return to School Planning](#)
 - ii. Local level advocacy for students to resume learning in school settings (i.e., seat time) in view of heightened anxiety among students, staff & community.

Quality Improvement

The school nurse is a key school health professional to collect and share school data in compliance with state and federal confidentiality regulations.

- 1. Data collection is needed before, during, after re-entry
 - a. Collaborate with state school nurse consultant and local/regional/state departments of health to collect and share accurate data following state reportable disease guidelines
 - i. [CDC Symptoms](#)
 - ii. [CDC Surveillance](#)
 - b. Data tracking
 - i. Daily tracking of attendance & monitoring for trends
 - ii. Daily tracking of staff & students with symptoms of COVID-19 sent home
 - iii. Data tracking of how school nurses are supporting students
 - 1. Number of evidence-based health education sessions
 - 2. Number of contact tracing
 - a. Note: This is not an expectation for school nurses unless trained and supported by local health dept.
 - b. Number of students receiving care coordination activities



Care Coordination

The school nurse aligns and coordinates school health services to manage, prevent, and/or reduce health issues.

1. Coordinate with student's family and health team
 - a. Plan for acute respiratory treatment care using up to date standard of care
 - i. Nebulizer treatments and suctioning are identified by the CDC as aerosol-generating procedures requiring a N95 Mask fitted to the healthcare worker. See [CDC Guidance for Aerosol Generating Procedures](#)
 - ii. Consult with healthcare provider for alternate asthma medication delivery systems
 - iii. Consult with school facilities department for clean air filtration system or preferably creating a negative pressure isolation room to reduce exposure.
 - b. Include trauma informed education practice to address behavioral health needs of students
 - i. Resource - [SAMSA Trauma-informed Care](#)
 - ii. Train students to recognize the somatization of emotions
 1. Example - Emotion Management [NASN Learning Center K-6 Emotional Management Program](#)
 - iii. Establish community behavioral health referral agencies
 - iv. Coordinate with school health professionals, counselors, social workers, school psychologists
 - c. Identify unmet needs
 - i. Students with pre-existing medical or mental health conditions
 1. May have stopped treatment
 2. Run out of medication or supplies
 3. Missed important appointments or procedures
 - ii. Students with disabilities, (IEP/504)
 1. May not have received needed educational and related services
 - iii. Medically fragile students and students with special healthcare needs
 1. Revise IHP's to address current healthcare considerations
 2. Work with interdisciplinary teams to address needs
 3. Communicate with parents and healthcare providers to determine return to school status and modify IEP as indicated
 - a. Use secure electronic forms and telehealth
 4. Advocate as needed for home/remote instruction
 - a. [CDC Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs in Emergencies](#)
 - d. Establish protocols for assessment of students with symptoms of COVID-19
 - i. Most common symptoms: fever, cough, and shortness of breath

- ii. Children are less likely to have symptoms as compared to adults, and many have no clinical symptoms
- iii. Reference: [CDC MMWR Report](#)
- e. Establish protocols for disposition of students/staff demonstrating COVID-19 symptoms
 - i. Home- consider having students wear masks if coughing
 - 1. Isolation for students during wait period
 - a. Some parents cannot miss work to pick up students
 - ii. Healthcare provider – notify of symptoms in advance
 - iii. Emergency Room – notify of symptoms in advance
 - iv. 911 EMS – notify of symptoms in advance

Community/Public Health

The school nurse delivers culturally competent proactive school health services for diverse student populations.

1. Health Education for School Community
 - a. [CDC Frequently Asked Questions](#)
2. CDC Print Resource Posters for Community Settings (multiple languages)
 - a. [Print Resources](#)
3. Stigma exists related to fear and anxiety associated with COVID-19. Reduce stigma, counter bias and bullying – education and intervention resources to prevent/stop bias incidents or bullying of students at risk (e.g. Asian ethnicity, homeless, receiving free lunch, living in or moved from a region with high number of cases, etc.)
 - a. Resource: [Stop Bullying COVID19](#)
4. Address multiple needs of school community
 - a. COVID-19 will not be the only health concern addressed by school health offices – state mandated screening; flu, pertussis, asthma, diabetes, severe allergies, seizures, etc.
 - b. Potential for change in economic status of families due to job loss.
 - i. Collaborate within systems to curate resource directory
 - ii. Assess for and refer as needed:
 1. Lack of access to normal healthcare providers
 2. Lack of adequate nutrition
 3. Lack of transportation
 4. Lack of housing security
 5. Lack of health insurance
5. Create a school environment that supports social distancing. Consider:
 - a. Staggered start times
 - b. Staggered academic days (half students in am/half in PM)
 - c. Limit activities when large groups of students are in close proximity
 - i. Work with specialists for PE, Music, Art, Recess, Cafeteria
 - ii. Revise to small group and outdoor activities

- iii. No sharing of musical instruments
- iv. Limited use of playground equipment
- v. Meals in classroom
- vi. Recess & passing periods
- d. Establish a safer school environment
 - i. Review and modify emergency plans, shelter in place, evacuation, etc.
 - ii. Implement intensified handwashing protocols/hand sanitizer protocols
 - 1. When staff and students arrive and dismiss
 - 2. At regular intervals during the day
 - a. Minimum of before meals, after toileting, after recess
 - iii. Develop screening protocols for staff and students entering school buildings if indicated
 - 1. CDC Guidance (pending)
 - 2. State/local health department guidance
 - a. Face covering for all staff and students (*if recommended and available)
 - b. Local and state guidance
 - c. [CDC Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)
 - d. CDC Guidance (pending)
 - e. Budget
 - f. Availability
 - iv. Establish isolation area to address students and staff with COVID19 symptoms occurring during school hours See [NASN Care of Students and Staff that Become Ill at School](#)
 - 1. Guidance on engineering flow through isolation process from identification of symptoms, to sending student/staff home from local/state health department
 - v. Frequent cleaning/disinfection of frequently used surfaces, healthcare workstation and isolation area
 - 1. Need for sink, toilets, and adequate ventilation in healthcare and isolation areas
 - 2. Federal, State, and local health department guidance
 - a. [EPA Guidance on Disinfectants](#)

3. PPE- acquire prior to school opening
 - a. [CDC Use of PPE with COVID19](#)
 - b. [CDC Burn Rate Calculator](#)
 - c. [CDC Strategies to Optimize PPE](#)
 - d. Healthcare Staff considerations
 - i. Facemasks – N95 vs surgical masks vs cloth masks
 - a. Determine risk based on role & social distancing
 - b. [NASN Facemask Considerations](#)
 - ii. Gowns – use of cloth covering as an alternative option
 - iii. Face shields preferably if available for isolation area
 - iv. Gloves
- vi. Vaccine administration, antibody/antigen testing or other testing for COVID19 at school
 1. Consult with public health, school administrators, and medical advisor to determine indicators, process to establish, obtain permission from guardians
 2. Immunization clinics may be offered for routine and new vaccines (COVID-19)

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