

Do Your Children Need a School Nurse?



If you are the parent of healthy, active children, your first answer might be no, not really. After all, they have a pediatrician, are hardly ever sick, occasionally need Urgent Care, and have health insurance. Both parents can be reached easily by phone at any time. No medications are required during school; no special accommodations are anticipated. Every year they have their eyes checked and their medical history is short and healthy. They see the dentist. Grandparents visit the school, even volunteer for the PTA. If something goes wrong they are available in a moment's notice.

- Believe it or not, even your child might need the school nurse someday. If a child of any age falls in the gym and can't walk, it is the school nurse who assesses the injuries, the child's reaction and the urgency with which medical care is required. There is a huge difference between ankle pain due to the trauma of falling and an ankle dislocation/fracture with impaired blood supply to the foot. One requires comfort measures and same-day medical evaluation and the other requires emergency transport to a hospital.
- Believe it or not, even your child could get splashed with a chemical in the eye in science class. Taking off their protective goggles to adjust them after an experiment has started, they may not realize the hazard they have just placed themselves in. It is the school nurse who knows how to get a scared child to accept eye irrigation while the teacher calls Poison Control and a secretary tries to reach a parent.
- Believe it or not, even your child could develop early signs of appendicitis during the school day. Not understanding these symptoms, they may only complain to the teacher of a stomach ache. It is the school nurse who reads the child's "body language," looks at skin color and temperature, listens to bowel sounds and checks for abdominal rebound tenderness. It is the school nurse who calls you and explains the urgency to leave your job, whether you work in law enforcement or the local grocery store (both employers might argue about sick time to pick up a child from school).

The media often insist on details to report about school nursing. They want to know whose life was saved, who suffered a tragedy, who takes multiple medications or who needs to be fed by a tube. But the school nurse is like the CIA: we can tell you what we do, but not whom we do it for. We can tell you what is wrong with our work setting, but we can't tell you where we work. We can tell you what the impact of our care is, but not when it will be needed, or who will need it. We strive to protect the privacy of each and every family, while sharing with specific people in the school only the things they need to know to keep the child safe and well. We aren't much for the glamour of the spotlight. Our days are too busy helping your children learn to navigate without you there, for a few hours each day. We are part of the school team.

Healthy kids learn better, and kids need to be healthy to learn

We are school nurses in public, private and parochial schools, BOCES, colleges, trade schools and pre-schools. We are there to provide specific nursing care to students who need individual health care plans, and we are there to meet the urgent and emergent needs of all children and staff. Often, we are the first ones to notice a subtle change in vision, growth, emotional needs that cause physical complaints and early infectious diseases. We really cannot list all the job responsibilities we have. Sometimes we draw on our skills and plan for a child's needs on the spur of the moment. Other times we organize sports physicals, spinal screenings or prepare to meet some student's needs for field trips. We teach parents how to get rid of head lice and we help parents assist their child in grieving the loss of a classmate.

When budgets are tight and you are voting on your school budget, you might think your child does not need the school nurse. Why not give us a call and ask what we have done lately for your child? You might be surprised to hear what we have done to make it possible for your child to develop an independent understanding of his/her own healthcare needs and subsequently be able to remain in school and achieve academic success. 🐼