

CHAPTER 35

SCHOOL HEALTH

BOARD OF HEALTH ROLE AT A GLANCE

- Promote and actively participate in comprehensive health education and health and human service programs in the schools.
- Serve as a member of the Comprehensive School Health Advisory Committee, which is described in the Comprehensive School Health Manual published by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.
- Participate with school staff in communicable disease prevention and control programs, including immunization programs and epidemiological investigations.
- Perform environmental inspections and enforcement as required by statute or as needed, including food services, general sanitation, hazardous wastes, indoor air quality, tobacco-free schools, construction site safety and others as needed.
- Provide school nursing and school physician services in those cities or towns where the board of health (BOH) has been given the responsibility for the provision of those services.

OVERVIEW

Although the concepts of school health have existed since the early 1900's, the expectations of school health programs have changed greatly over the years. Initially, school health programs focused on the control of communicable disease; however, today, the increasingly complex and diverse health needs of children and adolescents have stimulated an intense review of this limited focus. As communities seek to respond to the health issues of children and youth, they often look to the school to develop school-linked and/or school-based health services, largely because the school is an integral part of the community and the place where the majority of children and adolescents spend their "working days." Furthermore, the school's primary responsibility to provide education can be greatly enhanced by strategies to promote student health. In short, a healthy child is a teachable child who will learn to her/his maximum ability.

The increasing attention to health services in the school setting becomes clearer when one considers several factors:

- Based on the 1990 census, 12% of the Commonwealth's children, ages 5 to 18 live in poverty;
- The school health room is often the only "walk-in" clinic available to uninsured and underinsured children;

- Youth are increasingly at risk for violence, teen pregnancy, HIV infection, emotional problems and other social morbidities;
- Increasing numbers of students are being diagnosed with asthma, diabetes, life-threatening allergies and a variety of other illnesses requiring medications and other nursing care during the school day;
- As medical technology improves, more children with special health care needs (including those requiring procedures such as tracheostomy care and gastrostomy feedings, etc.) are attending school and require nursing care.

To be effective, school health services should be part of a larger comprehensive school health program. The traditional three-part model includes health education, health and human services and a healthful environment. Another model developed by the Centers for Disease Control describes eight components: health education, health services, social and physical environment, physical education, guidance and support services, food services, school and work-site health promotion, and integrated school and community health promotion. All models have in common the need for flexibility in approach, interdisciplinary collaboration, and a focus on prevention and coordination with the community system of care.

Strategies for reviewing and/or enhancing the community's school health program include, but are not limited to the establishment of a broad-based Comprehensive School Health Advisory Committee, completion of a school and community health needs assessment and subsequent policy and program development.

Since the local boards of health have a broad mandate to protect and advocate for the health of the entire population in their communities, there are many opportunities for participation in and collaboration with the school health program, educational leaders, and other community health programs with the broad goal of improving the health of the school-age population. The opportunities range from promoting comprehensive health education in the schools, serving on the Comprehensive School Health Advisory Committee and in some cities and towns, providing the school health services. In 1994, an informal survey revealed that 26 local boards of health or health departments provided school nursing services to the public schools in their communities. In many communities, public health nurses from the local BOH provide some school nursing services to non-public schools.

Local boards of health are strongly encouraged to review *The Comprehensive School Health Manual* published by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in 1995 and distributed to each public school in the Commonwealth as well as to each local BOH. Additional copies may be purchased from the State Bookstore, State House, Boston, MA 02133 (617-727-2834).

The manual is organized into four major sections:

- The School's Role in Child and Adolescent Health addresses new challenges and opportunities in school health, the development of an effective school health program, appropriate school health curricula, and a safe and healthful environment.
- Basic School Health Services addresses health assessment, nursing practice in the school setting, care of children with special health care needs, and infectious disease control.
- Prevention and Health Promotion addresses nutritional health, physical fitness and sports,

- mental health, sexuality and reproductive health, injury and violence prevention, tobacco control, substance abuse prevention, oral health, and health issues of newcomers to this country.
- General Resources and Index contains names, addresses and telephone numbers of general resources such as public health offices and prevention centers, as well as a comprehensive index.

Each chapter within the above sections clearly defines the responsibilities of the various providers of school health education and health services. The local BOH can contribute in many ways to the comprehensive school health program.

BOARD OF HEALTH RESPONSIBILITIES

The BOH must:

- Conduct environmental inspections and enforcement as required by statute, e.g. school food services, general sanitation (including bathrooms), indoor air quality, and hazardous wastes.
- Report clusters or outbreaks of any reportable communicable diseases in school-age children to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.
- In communities where the BOH is responsible for providing the public school health services, comply with the following statutes and regulations (N.B.: Only selected laws are described in this section. Refer to *The Comprehensive School Health Manual* for details on additional laws.):

M.G.L. c.71, s.53: Requires the BOH to appoint and assign the school physicians and registered nurses.

M.G.L. c.71, s.55: Requires temporary exclusion of students who are ill.

M.G.L. c.71, s.57: Requires physical examinations and certain screenings for students at specified times, in accordance with DPH regulations 105 CMR 200.000.

M.G.L. c.76, s.15: Requires immunizations, as defined in regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 105 CMR 220.000, for school attendance.

M.G.L. c.94C and regulations 105 CMR 210.000: Requires public and non-public schools to comply with minimum standards for the safe and proper administration of prescription medications, as defined in the regulations.

M.G.L. c.111, s.190-199A and regulations 105 CMR 460.050 and 460.060: Requires that children present evidence of having been previously screened for lead poisoning as a condition for entry into kindergarten.

M.G.L. c.112, s.80B: Requires licensed nurses to comply with regulations established by the Board of Registration in Nursing.

M.G.L. c. 119, s.51A: Requires nurses, physicians and others to report to the Department of Social Services any cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

BOARD OF HEALTH RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

The BOH is encouraged to participate in the community's school health program in the following areas:

- Serve on the Comprehensive School Health Advisory Committee.
- Facilitate linkage of tobacco control and prevention activities between the school and community.
- Cosponsor a community health fair or other health promotion activity with the local school department.
- Offer classroom presentations on health promotion and disease prevention topics.
- Sponsor a field trip to "See Your Health Department in Action."
- Advocate for a comprehensive K-12 health education curriculum in the local schools.
- Collaboratively plan and implement with public health nurses and school nurses an immunization program in the schools, e.g. Hepatitis B.
- Collaborate with school health staff on community cable TV health programs.
- Develop individual health teaching modules on specific topics such as prevention of disease transmission and basic hygiene (including handwashing) for preschool and kindergarten students. (An example of BOH /school collaboration occurred in Gloucester, MA, where the public health nurse developed a comprehensive model to deal with the issue of head lice. School nurses refer families who are having difficulties dealing with head lice to the public health nurse, who offers telephone consultation and educational material including a video for loan, "Lice: Some Things Shouldn't Be Shared." The nurse has a supply of RID, which the Board of Health sells at cost (\$3.00), a saving of \$10.00 off the retail price. If families come in to pick up the materials, the nurse will check both parents' and children's heads and demonstrate nit removal technique. When a more extensive evaluation has been required, she has visited the home, located visiting nurse agencies to make home visits with a physician's referral, and worked with other agencies to help obtain other assistance for families such as a DSS Parent Helper or clothing from Catholic Charities).

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

Conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Family and Community Health, Division of Prevention, School Health Unit, 250 Washington Street, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02108; (617) 624-5070; FAX (617) 624-5922.

DPH must:

- Establish recommendations for the delivery of school health services in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Methods of dissemination of these recommendations are by memoranda, *News in School Health* newsletters, and *The Comprehensive School Health Manual*, all of which are made available to the local boards of health.
- Provide schools and communities ongoing data on health status of children and youth via MassCHIP and other means.
- Propose and/or participate in revisions of current statutes and regulations, such as the immunization regulations and the regulations governing the administration of prescription medications in public and private schools.
- Oversee the implementation of all statutes and regulations regarding school health services (e.g. registration of school districts to permit delegation of medication administration to unlicensed personnel, approval of waivers to certain physical examination requirements).
- Provide and/or oversee the provision of training and continuing education programs for school health personnel.
- Collaborate with the Department of Education and other Executive Office of Health and Human Services departments in the areas of credentialing of school health personnel, services to children with special health care needs, and health education.
- Collect certain health status data (e.g. postural screening results) and service utilization data from state-funded school health service programs.
- Provide technical assistance and consultation regarding school health services to public and non-public schools as well as to citizens of the Commonwealth.

Other DPH Bureaus and Units with responsibility for school health related issues are:

- Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, Divisions of Epidemiology and Immunization, Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention, Tuberculosis Control and the Refugee and Immigrant Health Program: oversee all strategies for control of communicable diseases, including prevention, disease reporting and surveillance.
- AIDS Bureau: provide HIV prevention and education services as well as other HIV-related programs.
- Division of Food and Drugs: establish standards for food service establishments; register school districts to permit delegation of medication administration by unlicensed school personnel after initial approval by the School Health Unit.
- Division of Community Sanitation: establish standards for public and semi-public swimming pools, the handling and disposal of infectious waste.

- Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment: ensure public health compliance with the Massachusetts Right to Know Law; provide guidance and assessments of indoor air quality in schools.

Several other state agencies have mandates related to the schools and should be contacted directly for assistance as appropriate.

- Board of Registration in Nursing: licenses nursing personnel, establishes regulations governing nurses and nursing practice. 100 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA 02202 (617) 727-9961
- Department of Education: establishes standards for comprehensive health education, funds comprehensive health education programs in schools, provides certification of school personnel, conducts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, trains food service personnel. 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148 (617)388-3300
- Department of Environmental Protection: regulates the quality of the water supply, establishes the minimum standards for sewage disposal in unsewered areas.
- Department of Public Safety: establishes the minimum structural standards for school buildings, oversees local building inspectors' annual inspections of school buildings.
- Department of Mental Health: Area Offices provide information about local mental health resources and services available to the community, connect parents with parent support coordinators and support groups within their areas.
- Department of Mental Retardation: Area Offices provide family support services for the care of children with developmental disabilities, including information and referral, case management, respite care and recreational and support programs.

FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary federal agencies involved in school health are the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (created under Title V of the Social Security Act of 1935); the Division of Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control; and the U.S. Department of Education. These agencies are responsible for a variety of activities including research, funding of state school health initiatives, standard setting, federal regulatory enforcement and technical assistance.

RESOURCES

The Comprehensive School Health Manual, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 1995. Each local BOH has received a free copy.

News in School Health, published three times during each school year. A copy is sent to each local BOH.

School Health Resource Services, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, School of Nursing, Office of School Health. 1-800-669-9954; 1-303-270-5990