

School-Based Health Centers

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a school-based health center?

Put simply, a school-based health center is like a doctor's office inside of the school. In a school-based health center, a doctor, or more often, a nurse practitioner, is available to provide medical care to school students, faculty, and staff throughout the day. Sometimes, school-based health centers are also open to serve the larger community, and allow patients from outside the school building to utilize services much like a regular primary care office.

What is a nurse practitioner?

A nurse practitioner is an advanced practice nurse with special training, allowing them to independently treat patients. They are able to do many of the things that a doctor would do, including diagnose medical conditions, provide health education, and prescribe many medications for acute and chronic illnesses.

What types of services do nurse practitioners offer?

A nurse practitioner is able to conduct medical visits with patients and diagnose, treat, and prevent diseases. They are able to order tests and prescribe many medications much like your family doctor could. Nurse practitioners can help with immediate treatment of acute illnesses, such as flu, strep throat, pink eye, rashes, sinus infections, minor skeletal injuries, and the like. They are also able to help with the management of chronic illnesses, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease. Finally, nurse practitioners are able to conduct annual wellness/preventative visits, such as physicals and well-child checks. In a school-based health center, this can all be done right in the school, without a trip across town to the doctor's office!

How is the nurse practitioner different from the school nurse/health assistant?

The nurse practitioner staffing a school-based health center provides a higher level of care than the school nurse or health assistant can provide. While the school nurse is able to help with administering medications, taking temperatures, and providing ice packs and first aid for minor injuries, the nurse practitioner can go one step further by diagnosing a potential illness/injury and prescribing treatment. Often, if a school nurse observes that a student has a fever or other signs of illness, he/she might recommend that the child be seen by the nurse practitioner for diagnosis and treatment if necessary.

Can I still use the health center if I already have a different primary care doctor or pediatrician?

Absolutely! Our school-based nurse practitioners are available to help on those days when you can't make it to your normal doctor's office, even if you prefer to remain established with another pediatrician or family doctor. However, if you do not currently have a primary care/family doctor or pediatrician, our nurse practitioners are available and able to have you establish care with them so that they can provide long-term primary care.

What insurances are accepted? What if I don't/my child doesn't have insurance?

Mercy Health accepts most major commercial insurances as well as Medicaid and Medicare managed care and Tricare. If you are currently covered by a Marketplace or Healthcare.gov plan, please verify with our office that we accept your insurance as there are a few exceptions.

If you do not have insurance, we are happy to accept you as a self-pay patient. Self-pay patients received a 40% discount off of the total cost of services provided.

Whether or not you are insured, if you are concerned about being able to afford the out-of-pocket cost of health care, Mercy Health is here to help. We have a financial assistance program that may be able to help you reduce your bill. Please ask a clinic staff member for more information.

Do parents need to be present when the nurse practitioner is treating a minor student?

As long as consent for treatment has been granted in advance by a parent/guardian (via completed consent form or via phone/verbally), a parent does not need to be present for the nurse practitioner to treat a student. However, we welcome parents in our clinic and are happy to wait to see your child if you would prefer to be present during the visit. Either way, we will **always** attempt to notify you regarding treating your child, and will communicate any important information from the visit to parents either in person or via a letter or phone conversation.

Do I need to make an appointment or can I just walk in?

School students, faculty, and staff are often seen on a walk-in basis throughout the school day. However, if you prefer to know for sure that you won't have to wait, give the clinic a call for an appointment. If you are a community member without a connection to the school, just give us a call before walking in so that we know to expect you. In most cases, same-day appointments are available!