

## SBHC Hours of Operation

---

While there are no standards or requirements for school-based health center (SBHC) operating hours in Washington, there may be compelling reasons to operate at certain levels, during certain hours, or on certain days of the week. Some considerations include:

- What hours will best serve the needs of students and their families?
- What hours will best support teachers and school staff?
- What hours will best promote SBHC visibility, utilization, and long-term sustainability?

Hours of operation at start-up may depend on the size and needs of the school, the staffing model developed, expected visit volume, space available, and funding. Implementation can be staged, with services and hours expanded over time, though the SBHC will be more successful more quickly if it is visible, predictable, and seen as an available resource within the school during school hours. Whatever level of operations you start with, you will learn from the students and the school staff what works best over time, and you can expand or adjust service hours as needed.

### Hours to Serve Students

Traditionally, SBHCs offer appointments before, during, and after school to accommodate student and parent/guardian schedules. SBHCs operate in line with the school year calendar and the majority (though not all) close during school breaks. Parents/guardians, while encouraged to attend appointments if they would like to and are able, are not required to be present, and therefore the SBHC care team works primarily with the students to schedule appointments. This is especially true in the middle and high school setting. In the elementary school setting, parents are more closely involved in establishing care, scheduling initial appointments, and discussions around follow-up care plans. Some elementary SBHCs use video chat and telephone calls to include parents/guardians in appointments.

In deciding SBHC hours, start by talking with those who will be directly impacted by SBHC services:

- Ask **students** and **families** during planning and ongoing outreach: *When is it essential to have the SBHC open for student appointments - during school hours, before school, after school?* It may be critical to have some appointments available outside of school hours.
- Ask the **school nurse** and **administrative staff** who see students in the office when they are sick or injured: *when are health needs the highest for drop-in care?*
- Ask **school leadership** and **teachers**: *when is it preferable to pull students out of class for appointments?* You may get more administration and teacher buy-in for pulling students out of class during electives instead of during core classes. If this seems critical to SBHC school support and promotion, then prioritize hours when there are more electives and develop standard procedures to focus on pulling students from electives when creating appointment schedules.

Communicate consistently, however, that SBHC appointments take less time than off-site appointments, and SBHC visits help keep students healthy, in their seats, and ready to learn.

## SBHC Hours of Operation

---

Some other considerations:

- SBHC hours in the morning may allow for referrals to community-based health care providers for later in the day if needed.
- Students may need follow-up. Daily hours are easiest for students and families to remember and they allow SBHC providers to follow-up with students more easily if needed.

### Serving Others in the Community

If facilities, zoning and resources allow and you are planning to offer services to students' families, school staff or other community members in a family practice model, consider how to maintain the student focus of the SBHC:

- Consider serving only students during the school day and opening the SBHC to community members outside of school hours, on weekends, and/or on school breaks.
- If students and community members may be seen in the SBHC at the same time, consider separate entrances and waiting areas for students during the school day to maintain student confidentiality and comfort with using the SBHC.

### Hours for Visibility and Utilization

The more consistent and frequent the SBHC hours are open, the greater the visibility and utilization:

- Families and students will see the SBHC as accessible and will know when it is open.
- SBHC staff can build relationships with students, families, teachers, and school staff more easily with a greater physical presence.
- The school nurse, counselors, teachers, and other school staff will see the SBHC as a reliable resource, and they will be more likely to make student and family introductions and referrals.

### Communicating Hours

It is important to collaborate with the school on developing and communicating SBHC operating hours. The school nurse is responsible for the health of the entire student population, and when the school nurse is not on site, then school administration is responsible for student health. The school needs to know when they can count on the SBHC care team to be available to assist with student health questions and concerns, or to support the school in urgent or emergency situations.

If the SBHC is not open every day during school hours, clearly communicate the SBHC's hours so everyone knows when appointments can be made, when services are provided, and whom to contact for emergency care. This might be through websites, signage, printed materials, and recorded phone greetings. The school administrative staff will be key in communicating the SBHC's operating hours when SBHC staff are not on-site.