

A school-based health center (SBHC) is about providing excellent care to students in a space where they feel comfortable. There are certain facility requirements for providing care from a medical or mental health provider, though SBHCs can vary greatly in location and size depending on a number of factors.

Benefits of co-locating SBHC with the school nurse

The school may prefer and have the ability to co-locate the SBHC with the school nurse or locate them in close proximity. The school nurse is responsible for the overall health of the students in the school, a trusted leader in the school community, a critical member of the students' health team and a key source of SBHC referrals. See [School Nurses and SBHCs in Washington](#) for an overview of school nurse and SBHC roles and collaboration.

Collaboration with the school nurse and health aides in the school can be essential for SBHCs to provide quality care to students. The school nurse and health aides can:

- Help identify students who need SBHC services such as immunizations, well-child checks/sports physicals, mental or behavioral health support and dental care
- Promote SBHC registration by encouraging parents/guardians to complete the necessary consent forms
- Provide a referral and warm hand-off of students who visit the school nurse's office frequently and may particularly benefit from SBHC services and support

While co-locating the SBHC with the school nurse is not required, it can influence SBHC registration rates, referrals and warm hand-offs, walk-ins, and overall SBHC utilization.

Other considerations

The SBHC will ideally be located in a visible location in the school, where students, families and school staff will pass by and stop in to learn more about SBHC services.

However, SBHCs are not always able to be located in a well-trafficked area of the school or in the main school building for various reasons, including space constraints. Some students may prefer to access SBHC services in a more private location. Some SBHCs operate in separate buildings or portables on the school grounds. A location with both an internal and external entrance, or in a building separate from the main school, may be preferable if the SBHC is designed to serve other community members outside of school hours.

Wherever the SBHC is located, The SBHC's location and facilities should be considered jointly by a school district's facilities staff, school administrators and the SBHC sponsoring organization, accounting for the size and population of the school and services to be offered.

Elementary school model

Some elementary school SBHCs are as small as 200 square feet and may include only two rooms in close proximity to one another. At a minimum, the elementary school SBHC needs to include ADA-accessible space for the following functions, services and staff:

- A student waiting area with a desk for the SBHC coordinator to welcome students and parents/guardians and check them in for their appointments
- Private confidential office/exam room(s) for the medical and behavioral health providers.

If space does not allow to have two private rooms for medical and behavioral health services, the shared clinical space must have an exam table and a sink located in it. Some elementary schools with space constraints have the medical provider and behavioral health therapist share one room with schedules that complement one another, e.g. medical services provided on Mondays and Wednesdays and behavioral health services provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It may be preferred, however, that providers are able to work at the same time, and that the medical provider is on site when the school nurse is present, for optimal collaboration.

Middle and high school models

Middle and high school SBHCs might range from 900 square feet to 1,500 square feet. At a minimum, middle and high school SBHCs may need to include ADA-accessible space for the following functions, services and staff:

- A student waiting area with a desk for the SBHC coordinator or staff to welcome students and check them in for their appointments
- An exam room
- Private offices for the behavioral health therapist(s), medical provider and health educator (if applicable).

Notes:

- *While a separate office for the medical provider is not required, it may create a more welcoming environment for conversation with students.*
- *The use of white noise machines outside of all private offices where patient and provider interactions take place promote patient confidentiality. Some SBHCs may also play music in the waiting area for this reason.*
- A private bathroom with a specimen pass-through to the lab to promote patient privacy

Note: A pass-through is ideal when possible, but not required as cabinets to collect specimens are also an option. Some SBHCs also stock their bathroom with hygiene essentials

that students can access privately such as travel size shampoo, toothbrushes, deodorant, tampons, pads, etc.

- A separate locked room for the lab area, vaccine storage, and medication dispensary is ideal. The lab should have a sink and locked storage for medication. A sink area with cabinets can also serve as a lab if a separate room is not possible.
- If space allows, a flexible, additional office or conference room can be helpful for bringing additional services to students through e.g. community mental health providers, interns, nutritionists, group therapy and youth-led activities.
- The school nurse (if co-located) will require space determined by the school district.

If space allows, having dedicated spaces for each health service may provide the best working conditions for staff and most comfortable spaces for students. The total space available and the amount of time staff are on site contribute to the number of students a SBHC can expect to serve.

A welcoming space

Wherever the SBHC is located, make the space welcoming to students. Educational bulletin boards that are youth-friendly, student art in the waiting area, and school colors decorating the SBHC may all be good additions to a new SBHC space. A digital screen or TV that can display rotating education information can also be helpful. Posting signs about how “we respect everyone’s privacy” and explaining that no one shares who they see or what they hear in the SBHC is a way to introduce adolescents to confidentiality in health care and important for developing trust with students. The SBHC space should be a youth-friendly and safe environment, where students might stop in without an appointment to get health resources and supplies, healthy snacks, tea for calming nerves, and a caring adult to listen to them if they have a question or concern.

SBHC equipment and furnishing needs

The core medical services that SBHCs offer are the same as those offered typically at a Primary Care Provider’s (PCP) office. The same standard equipment found at a family practice or pediatric clinic can be used at a SBHC, with a range of sizes from pediatric to adult equipment available. The standard equipment list can vary from site to site based on the skills and training of the medical provider, the needs of the student population, the space available, and budgets.

Below are some standard office/room set-up considerations for a SBHC if space, funding, staffing, and services allow:

- Medical exam room(s):
 - Ideally, will include a sink. A portable sink may be an option if absolutely necessary.

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- In-room lockable storage (can be moveable) is ideal. If not available in the exam room, lockable storage will be needed somewhere in the SBHC space. If any medications will be stored on-site, RX storage regulations apply. Cipher cabinet code locks are common, typically behind a lockable door.
 - Exam table. Types vary widely. In high school and middle school SBHCs, most common are standard exam room tables that can be used for both adults and children. In elementary SBHCs, pediatric exam tables may be more common but standard exam tables may also be appropriate. Power exam tables may be considered based on budget and applicability of the population being served.
 - 1-2 chairs (wipe-able) for parent or guardian.
 - Other standard equipment per exam room often includes: phone, exam stool, provider workstation with computer (often mobile), privacy curtain, waste and linen bins, biohazard bins and sharps container, glove and other wall unit dispensers, supply storage areas (mobile carts or build in casework) and diagnostic equipment (blood pressure cuff, otoscope, etc)
 - Other considerations (often only 1 unit needed per area if multiple exam rooms and not in every exam room): Procedure or exam light, digital scale with adapter, pulse oximeter, glucometer, nebulizer, spirometer, UV Woods Light, and bloodborne pathogens clean-up kit, and AED.
- Building in maximum flexibility by using mobile supply carts and workstations can be beneficial and allow exam room spaces to serve other needs as services and demands evolve.
 - In a separate office or workplace if possible, a separate workstation (computer, phone, desk and chair) for the medical provider is beneficial outside of the exam room.
 - The behavioral health provider's office should have a workstation (computer, phone, desk and chair) and a comfortable chair or small couch for the patient and parent when applicable. Furniture should be wipeable/cleanable so can be sanitized between patients. Therapy supplies such as small toys, puzzles, games, kinetic sand, journals and art supplies may be good resources to start. Therapy supplies will be dependent on the behavioral health provider's treatment modalities.
 - Workstation space for any support staff. A check-in desk and small waiting area is typical as mentioned above, but may vary depending on the size of the school and population being served. Space should be designed to be well utilized and flexible when possible.

- Staff support furniture/equipment to consider: staff refrigerator, microwave, sink/dishwasher, respite space, conference room/multipurpose space with large monitor/TV with computer for televideo use or virtual meetings, digital whiteboard, etc.
- The lab will need a sink and locked storage for medication as described in more detail in above sections. Depending on the lab services provided on site (and/or through a contracting lab services provider), the equipment could include: a microscope, hemoglobin analyzer, oxygen cart, stacking refrigerator and freezer for vaccines, digital thermometers for vaccine storage (and temperature tracking system), specimen refrigerator, biowaste basket, phlebotomy cart and tray, blood draw tube rack, autoclave, Afinion HbA1c test package, wheelchair, ECG or EKG, and centrifuge. Sponsor organizations should follow their typical set-up for serving pediatric populations.