

8 Questions to Ask About School-Based Health Centers



Before signing any paperwork for a School-Based Health Center (SBHC), or any other healthcare on the school premises, parents deserve full transparency. Use these questions to guide conversations with your school and to protect your right to informed consent.

1

Is there a School-Based Health Center at our school and who operates it?

Many parents are surprised to learn that often the SBHC is not operated by the school but is operated by a separate entity contracting with the school or district. Ask questions about the financial arrangements and contracts – who is benefiting from allowing the SBHC to operate on school property. Is the school liable for harms that occur at the SBHC?

Notes:

2

How is the SBHC different from the school nurse?

Is there a school nurse (employed by the school) available and can I consent to only having my child treated by the nurse with my knowledge and consent?

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What exactly am I consenting to with the SBHC?

Many SBHCs use broad “blanket consent” forms at the start of the school year. These forms may allow providers to administer vaccines, prescribe medications, offer reproductive or mental health counseling, dental care, and conduct screenings without further notice to you. Parents should request a copy of the form, cross out any services they do not agree to, and sign only for limited care (e.g., first aid only).

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Will I be notified every time my child receives care?

Parents should insist on notification—written or by phone—every time their child receives care beyond routine first aid. Some SBHCs provide treatments or counseling sessions without notifying parents. Ask your school and the clinic for a written policy guaranteeing that you will always be informed.

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Who are the SBHC providers, and what are their credentials?

SBHCs may employ physicians, nurse practitioners, mental health counselors, dentists, and social workers. Many are outside contractors, not school staff. Parents should request names, qualifications, and the organizations actually employing these providers (are they employees or independent contractors of the school? Of the SBHC?). Ask how these providers are compensated and if they are required to have professional liability insurance. Ask who oversees them and how complaints or concerns are handled. Ask who is liable if something goes wrong.

Notes:

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Can my child be treated without my permission?

In some states with ‘minor consent’ laws, children, in some instances, as young as 11–12, may legally consent on their own to vaccines, mental health services, reproductive care, or even gender-related services. This means your child could be treated without your knowledge or approval. Ask your school what state laws apply and demand to be included in all decision-making.

Notes:

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Who pays for SBHC treatment?

Ask about how costs for SBHC treatment are covered. Are they billing your insurance? Can you opt out of insurance coverage for this care? Is the school district paying? Is Medicaid paying for Medicaid eligible children? Some SBHCs may bill a parent’s insurance and still refuse access to information about the care received.

Notes:

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How is my child’s health information stored and shared?

SBHCs operate under a mix of HIPAA and FERPA regulations, which can allow health data to be shared between schools, healthcare providers, and sometimes state agencies. Parents should ask how records are stored, who has access, and if they can view all notes and records. Insist on written guarantees that your child’s information will not be shared without your consent.

Notes:



Tip: Always request copies of everything you sign, and consider filing a Non-Consent Form to limit care to emergency first aid only unless you are present.

