Health Education: The School Nurse’s Role

- Georgia Performance Standards 4
- Bulletin Boards 5
- Health Fairs 6
- Health Education Classes 7
  - Template 8
  - Ideas 8
  - Sample - Hand Hygiene 10
The intent of comprehensive school health education is to motivate students to maintain and improve their health, to prevent disease and to avoid or reduce health-related risk behaviors. High quality health education contributes to significant improvements in knowledge and skills that students need to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

In 2007, the Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards formulated eight basic standards that students will:

- comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- demonstrate the ability to access valid information products and services to enhance health.
- demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.
- analyze the influence of culture, family, peers, media, technology and other factors on health behaviors.
- demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.
- demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family and community health.

Local school districts can use National Health Education Standards (NHES) as a basis for decisions about health education curriculum. Information on the standards can be reviewed at [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sher/standards/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sher/standards/). In addition, the Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) can help school districts, schools, and others conduct a clear, complete, and consistent analysis of health education curricula based on the National Health Education Standards and CDC’s Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sher/characteristics/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sher/characteristics/index.htm)).

The goal of health education curriculum content areas is to provide functional health information and allow students to develop the essential skills used in adopting, practicing and maintaining healthy behaviors. Effective curricula focus on developing critical skills such as communication, stress management, decision-making and goal-setting.

These 10 content areas include:

- personal health
- family health
- community health
- environmental health
- growth and development/sexuality
- mental and emotional health
- safety and injury prevention
- nutrition
- prevention and control of disease
- prevention of substance use and abuse

Another term that can be used is “health literacy,” which has been defined in the National Health Education Standards as “the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways that are health-enhancing” (Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards, 1995).

Parents and other family members serve as the student’s first health educators, but students also learn from peers, the media, manufacturers’ advertising and the government. Teachers and school nurses can provide a vital link in helping students to filter the information they receive from other sources and put the knowledge gained into a context that leads to healthy life skills.

Comprehensive health education in the school contributes to all of the other components of the coordinated school health program. The school health services staff can teach effective ways to access the health system, provide information on different levels of healthcare providers in the community, and model excellent health practices for students. The integrated staff wellness program can give staff members the tools to model healthy behaviors and reinforce health messages in their daily interactions with students. Counseling and psychological staff often coordinate school-wide prevention activities, such as suicide prevention programs, ghost-outs (drunk-driving prevention program), etc. Health education, physical education and school nutrition services staff can work together to implement programs which will enhance healthy behaviors in eating and physical activity. These efforts can have a far-reaching effect on health issues such as prevention of obesity.
School nurses teaching about conflict resolution skills and stress management also can help create a healthy psychological environment. Policies such as a ban on tobacco use in the school reinforce health messages about the health risk of tobacco use and improve the healthy school environment. Finally, parent and community involvement can enhance the health education message by bringing more resources to the school and providing information for families so that health lessons can be reinforced at home. Parents can also be involved in school health advisory committees, as guest speakers in health classes and in health promotion efforts such as health fairs.

By being involved in health education in multiple ways, both formally and informally, the school nurse can make the largest impact toward the goal of “Healthy Children, Ready to Learn.” The nurse can always take advantage of “teachable moments” in the health clinic, taking time to talk to students about such topics as the importance of hand hygiene and cleaning wounds, ways to keep yourself healthy and ways to ask for help when you need it.

More ways in which the school nurse can provide health education in the school include:

- teaching students and staff informally during daily contacts with them
- teaching classes for staff on infection control, CPR, first aid, specific illnesses and health issues
- conferencing with teachers and staff about an individual student's health needs and effects on the educational process
- teaching students in the classroom on health-related topics and curriculum
- advocating for healthy practices that will have a direct effect on education and attendance such as hand hygiene, including availability of all necessary supplies
- bulletin boards in the health clinic, teacher's lounge and hallways
- health fairs for students and/or staff.

When school nurses leave the clinic to teach in the classroom, they need to consider the impact that their absence will have on the health clinic. Having another nurse, volunteer or clinic aide to substitute on a regular basis is one solution. One effective solution is to inform teachers and staff ahead of time about your teaching schedule so that students will not be sent to the health clinic except in the case of an emergency. Another good practice is to leave a note on the clinic door listing the room in which you are teaching. Some nurses have a “planning” time, like teachers do, to plan classes and assemble health education materials.

The information included in this chapter will provide some ideas and resources to use in the nurse's health education role.
Georgia Performance Standards

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) spell out health subject matter appropriate for each grade level, giving lesson plans and Web resources. Visit www.georgiastandards.org/Standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/HealthEd.aspx to access the Georgia Performance Standards. These standards can help guide you in planning your class material. Teachers appreciate guest speakers like school nurses to cover some of these GPS health curriculum topics whenever possible.
Bulletin Boards

- Ask the principal for a bulletin board(s) inside and/or outside the health clinic.
- You may also want to have a board or an area for pamphlets in the staff lounge.
- You can use, change and reuse fabric backgrounds, pinned or stapled to the board.
- Colorful borders can be purchased at teacher supply stores or be shared among the staff as boards are changed.
- Keep bulletin boards at students’ eye level with messages short and easy to read.
- Use the Health Observances calendar, seasonal health issues or health issues in the news to give you ideas.
- Keep your board simple, with good visuals to attract attention.
- Use computer clip art (increased in size), posters, magazine pictures and even students’ pictures. Letters can be printed from a computer in a large, clear font (150-200 size) or with a die-cutter. Save time and work by printing these, cutting them in square shapes and laminating them. Then they can be saved and reused.
- Many organizations like the Dairy Council may send you free posters or pictures to use.
- Search for free health study aides and resources on an Internet search engine, like www.google.com.
- For more ideas, look at http://snp.homestead.com (Gerri Harvey’s School Nurse Perspectives Web site) or visit the Internet and research “bulletin board ideas.” More useful sites are listed at the end of this chapter.
Health Fairs

Planning a health fair is a time-consuming but very rewarding project. Fairs can be held for staff on a teacher workday; for students in the media center or covered play area so that classes can rotate through; and/or for parents and students on a Saturday or in conjunction with a PTA meeting.

Two good resources for planning a health fair include:

- The American Medical Association

- Health Fair Planning Guide, Wellness Toolkit – United Healthcare

One trick used to make sure children get the most from a health fair experience is to give them a “ticket” with each “learning station” listed. As they go to each and complete the learning activity, they can have their ticket signed or stamped. When they complete the ticket, ensure that they receive a “prize” (an apple, a sticker, something provided by one of your sponsors). PTA/PTO organizations usually provide a great source of community information and contacts, as well as volunteers for the event.
Health Education Classes

Most school systems have a prescribed curriculum for health education topics. However, teachers may feel that hearing the information from a nurse could have a greater impact on the students. Therefore, the nurse may be asked or may volunteer to teach some classes within this curriculum (or may provide classes not currently being offered). Some ideas for health education curriculum for various levels are included later in this chapter. Recent CDC statistics show that three quarters of all youth risk behaviors and two thirds of adult risk behaviors which lead to mortality and morbidity fall into these six categories, giving us a clear focus for health education.

Risk Behavior(s):
- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence
- Sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection
- Alcohol and other drug use
- Tobacco use
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors
- Inadequate physical activity.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Adolescent and School Health at:

Health Education Resources
Adolescent and School Health Topics – CDC
www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/healthtopics/index.htm

Adolescent and School Health, Multimedia Topics
www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/multimedia.htm

Georgia Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
www.gahperd.org/

School Health Guidelines – CDC
www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/publications.htm#1

Strong4Life
www.strong4life.com
Template for Health Education Classes

Here is a “template” the nurse might use in presenting a class:

- Introduce yourself and tell the class that nurses love the opportunity to help them prevent problems, make healthy choices and stay well (as we are “proactive specialists in health and wellness”). In general, the teacher should stay in the room to assist with children who may be a distraction to others and to reinforce health messages after the teaching session ends.
- Introduce the topic for the day.
- Begin with a five-minute dramatic or humorous story to capture student interest and attention—a true story, news article, experience from your nursing past (i.e. a class on hygiene might start with the Shel Silverstein poem, “The Dirtiest Man in the World,” from Where the Sidewalk Ends - www.snp.homestead.com/HygieneGr5.html).
- Ask the students a few open-ended questions, like “tell me what you think,” to link your story to something the students already know. This probing is the first step for any new learning to take place and can make the difference between passive listening and an engaged mind.
- Give students the information on the topic, using audiovisuals and manipulatives if possible. Remember the age of the students in planning your time. For the young school-age child, 15 to 20 minutes is enough didactic material.
- Ask the teacher how long the program should be, or how much time he or she can allow you.
- Any time you can involve the children in an activity, it will enhance learning.
- Respond to questions and allow some time for them to share stories related to the topic.
- Summarize the class by giving them three main “takeaway” points you want them to remember and thank them for their attention.

Adapted from Gerri Harvey’s School Nurse Perspectives Newsletter, Issue 1; email schoolnurse-subscribe@topica.com to subscribe.

Ideas for Health Education Classes

Elementary School

- **Personal and Family Health** includes learning about your body, healthy behaviors, hand hygiene, conflict resolution, avoiding bullies.
- **Safety and Injury Prevention** includes automobile and pedestrian safety, wheel safety, water safety, fire safety, poison prevention.
- **Nutrition and Physical Activity** includes positive body image, MyPlate, healthy eating practices, importance of being active.
- **Tobacco and Alcohol Prevention** involves the risks of tobacco use—smoking and spit tobacco, inhalants, saying “no” to peer pressure.

Middle School

- **Personal and Family Health** includes puberty education, respect for yourself and others, hand hygiene and personal hygiene, conflict resolution, peer-proofing, getting help with feelings, stress reduction, communication skills, positive relationships, reducing health risks.
- **Safety and Injury Prevention** includes dealing with bullies, safety on wheeled vehicles, using public transportation safely, water safety, gun safety, first aid, CPR.
- **Nutrition and Physical Activity** includes MyPlate, fruits and vegetables, drinking water and the benefits of physical activity.
- **Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Prevention** includes healthy decisions, physical risks, peer and media influence, inhalants, tobacco, steroids, marijuana.
High School

- **Personal and Family Health** includes personal standards, feelings and mental health, managing stress, communicating about problems, respect in relationships, causes of illness, preventive healthcare, hand hygiene and personal hygiene, selecting and using healthcare products, developing self-care skills, access to healthcare services, AIDS, STIs, pregnancy prevention. Be sure to check the district Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and local guidelines for these topics.

- **Safety and Injury Prevention** includes first aid, DUI, suicide prevention, anger management, CPR, active listening and assertiveness, avoiding sports injuries.

- **Nutrition and Physical Activity** includes MyPlate, drinking water, marketing and peer influences on food choices, physical activity (making it a habit) and health benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

- **Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Prevention** includes staying smoke-free, Calling It Quits program, influences on your choices, consequences of all choices, alcohol and drug effects, help for alcohol and other drug use.


---

Note: Nurses will still need to check any sex education curriculum with your local school board’s sex education advisory committees before providing any instruction. Some districts have adopted a policy of “abstinence only” education. The Georgia State Code chapter list can be found at [www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/default.asp](http://www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/default.asp)

**Georgia State Code: 20-2-773**

- Restrictions on student health services; utilization of state funds
  (a) No facility operated on public school property or operated by a public school district and no employee of any such facility acting within the scope of such employee’s employment shall provide any of the following health services to public school students:
    (1) Distribution of contraceptives;
    (2) Performance of abortions;
    (3) Referrals for abortion; or
    (4) Dispensing abortifacients.
  (b) The Department of Education and local units of administration are prohibited from utilizing state funds for the distribution of contraceptives.
Sample Health Education Class – Hand Hygiene

A sample curriculum and resources for teaching hand hygiene at any grade level is included on the following pages. Hand Hygiene is defined as any action of hand cleaning (generally performed either by hand rubbing with an alcohol-based formulation or handwashing with soap and water). According to the World Health Organization, “Hand hygiene is the primary measure to reduce infections…”

For the most updated and proper directions on hand hygiene, visit the following resources:

- Glitterbug — Brevis
  www.brevis.com

- Hand Hygiene Basics – CDC
  www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/Basics.html

- Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings – CDC
  www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/Guidelines.html

- Handwashing: Clean Hands Saves Lives – CDC
  www.cdc.gov/handwashing

- Handwashing, Teachers Corner – Body and Mind, CDC
  www.bam.gov/teachers/epidemiology_hand_wash.html

- Healthy Schools, Healthy People – It’s a Snap
  www.itsasnap.org

- Microbe World
  www.washup.org

- Scrub Club – NSF International
  http://www.scrubclub.org/home.aspx
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - Germbusters Hand Hygiene Class

Ask some questions and take just a couple of answers for each one, asking them to raise their hands.

• Do you think you know how to wash your hands?
• How many of you wash your hands at school? At home?
• When do you wash your hands?
• Why do you wash your hands?

Why

• Tell the students basic facts about germs:
  – Germs are everywhere.
  – Germs are very small and can be seen only with a microscope.
  – Some germs can make you sick.
  – You can get rid of germs by washing your hands the right way.
• Use a spray bottle of water to squirt a small amount of water into each child’s hand. Ask each child to touch his hand to his desk, chair or clothes.
• Ask, “What happens?”
• Explain this is what happens when we sneeze or cough our germs into our hands and don’t wash them before touching someone or something else.
• For older elementary age groups, include information on how the body forms antibodies to help us fight the germs with which we do come in contact with, as well as the concept of immunizations and how they work.

How

• Demonstrate proper handwashing, explaining that:
  – soap and water are the tools;
  – friction and the final rinse are the actions that remove the germs.
• If the room has no sink, just go through the motions:
  – Turn on the water and wet your hands.
  – Apply liquid soap on your hands. It doesn’t take much!
  – Rub your hands together to make bubbles.
  – Scrub for about 20 seconds, teaching the children to sing a short song while they wash, such as, Happy Birthday (sung twice).
  – Go over the back and front, between your fingers and around and under your fingernails.
  – Explain that germs like to hide in these places.
  – Rinse in running water to wash all the germs down the drain.
  – Dry your hands and use the paper towel to turn the water off, before throwing it in the trash.
• Explain that it is important to keep the school restrooms as clean as possible.

Note: Alcohol handgels are not appropriate for use when hands are visibly dirty or contaminated with proteinaceous materials. Wash your hands with soap and water when your hands are visibly soiled.
When

It is important to wash your hands:
• before you eat or prepare food
• after you go to the bathroom
• after you sneeze, cough or blow your nose
• when you see dirt on them
• after you play with animals or play outside
• after you handle money.

Can you think of other times?
• It is important to wash your hands even more often when you or others in your family are sick.
• You should also wash your hands when you first come home from school, especially if you have younger brothers and sisters at home who do not go to school yet. The little ones in your family have not been around germs as much as you have, and their bodies can’t fight germs as well.
• You can be a good role model for your family by showing them what you have learned about handwashing and how hand hygiene can keep your whole family healthy.

Demonstrations
• Class participation will go a long way toward helping students remember the lesson:
• Use products such as Glitterbug by Brevis (www.brevis.com), which uses an ultraviolet lotion and a black light to show them how germs are invisible and how well children are washing their hands.
• Put glitter, powder or chalk dust on your hands, then shake hands with each child to show the class how germs can spread and let them see if they have done a good job of washing.
• Teach children to cough or sneeze into their elbow, instead of covering their mouth with their hands—that way they don’t spread their germs and Mom can wash them away in the laundry.
• If time does not permit, use one or two volunteers, asking one to wash properly and the other to wash quickly without using soap and friction.

Summary
• Hand hygiene is the best way to keep germs from making you sick.
• Remember, no one can do this for you—you are in charge of remembering when and how to wash your hands.
• Other ways you can keep yourself from getting sick:
  – avoid sharing drinking cups or cans, spoons and forks
  – get enough rest at night
  – eat healthy foods
  – go to your doctor for check-ups and immunizations.
• Other useful resources for a hand hygiene class (Web sites and books you can read to the class) are listed at the end of the scripts.
• Check the media center for books they may have on hand that you may read to the class.
MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL - Hand Hygiene Class

• Studies have proven that careful and frequent hand hygiene can prevent disease and reduce the rate of absenteeism in schools (for teachers and students).
• Other studies have shown that at least half of middle school students do not wash their hands after using the bathroom, even when soap and water are provided.
• Students share close contact with each other and with teachers every day.
• The student can infect teachers and members of his/her family with these illnesses.
• When a student is absent with an illness that could have been prevented, he will miss classes he needs to learn from as well as extracurricular activities.
• The diseases we are talking about range from common colds to influenza, to hepatitis, to rotavirus (which causes diarrhea), to foodborne illnesses like Salmonella and E.coli (which can be life-threatening).
• Clean hands are the key to prevention.

What is the big deal with hand hygiene?

• Germs are tiny organisms that can only be seen with a microscope.
• They are invisible on our hands and in our environment, and billions of these microorganisms are on and in our bodies and in the world around us.
• Most are harmless, and some are even helpful.
• Pathogens are disease germs that can cause contagious illnesses that spread from person to person. There are six categories of these germs - viruses, bacteria, rickettsiae, fungi, protozoans and parasitic worms. Viruses and bacteria are the disease-causing agents for most infections that children get.

Viruses

• Viruses are smaller than most other known cells.
• They are composed of protein and nucleic acid, the genetic material that allows them to multiply rapidly and cause illness in the human body.
• They multiply after invading cells in your body, such as the cold virus which makes a home in your nose after you shake hands with someone who has just coughed and not washed their hands.
• Viruses are responsible for more diseases than any other type of pathogen.
• Antibiotics are not effective against viruses.

Some of the diseases that are caused by viruses:

• common cold or influenza,
• certain types of diarrhea,
• chickenpox, measles or mumps,
• cold sores, fever blisters,
• hepatitis or AIDS,
• Scientists also believe viruses may be responsible for certain kinds of cancer and even diabetes.
Bacteria

• Bacteria are one-celled organisms that are shaped like rods (bacilli), spirals (spirilla) or round spheres (cocci).
• They grow and reproduce quickly by doubling in size and splitting in half.
• Bacteria can be found everywhere in our environment, so you can come in contact with them on almost everything you touch.
• Bacteria need food, moisture and warmth to survive and multiply.
• They can produce toxins that poison the body or infections that can affect one part of the body (like a boil) or your whole system (like bacteremia).
• Bacteria and viruses can contaminate food and water supplies when just one person is not doing proper hand hygiene.
• Antibiotics are effective against some bacteria, but prevention is always best.

Some of the diseases that are caused by bacteria:

• Strep throat,
• pneumonia,
• diphtheria,
• tetanus,
• dental cavities,
• food poisoning.

When

Use questions such as:

• When do you need to wash?
• Let’s see if we can make this list together.
• Who can tell me one time?

Write them on the board and make sure the following are listed:

• after using the bathroom or changing a diaper
• before you eat
• before, during and after you prepare food
• when your hands look dirty
• after handling animals and animal waste
• after sneezing or coughing
• before handling your contact lenses or putting on makeup
• before and after you treat a cut or take care of someone who is sick
• more frequently when you or someone around you is sick.
Demonstrations
Older students love to “see” the effects of handwashing and may enjoy using the ultraviolet lotion and black light as much as younger students do. This lesson can also be incorporated into the curriculum in lots of other ways. These include:

• Conducting a germ investigation using Petri dishes to grow bacteria from various parts of the school or the body,
• Having a math class figure out how many bacteria there would be after a period of time if they divide every 20 minutes,
• Studying and reporting on an epidemic from the past or the present,
• Helping with a campaign to promote hand hygiene in the school by designing posters, etc.
• Go to www.itsasnap.org for more curriculum ideas.

The “Body and Mind - Teacher’s Corner” is a great resource from the CDC. It provides a curriculum that includes much of the above information.
www.bam.gov/teachers/epidemiology_hand_wash.html

Alcohol-Based Gels

• Alcohol-based gels (alcohol-based handrubs - 70 percent isopropanol) can be used instead if soap and water are not available.
• Alcohol-based gels are not appropriate for use when hands are visibly dirty or contaminated with proteinaceous materials.
• Wash your hands with soap and water when your hands are visibly soiled.
• According to the CDC, recurrent use of alcohol-based gel hand sanitizers is not recommended without adequate handwashing between uses.
• Because a person may feel a “build-up” of emollients on their hands after repeated use of alcohol hand gels, washing hands with soap and water after five to 10 applications of a gel has been recommended by certain manufacturers.
• It is therefore recommended to wash hands between gel use when a person feels a build-up of gel on hands or if your hands are visibly dirty or have potentially been exposed to infectious material or bodily fluids.

Summary

• You are the only one that can make hand hygiene happen for you, and you can be an important part of keeping the school and your family healthy.
• Hand hygiene is one of the first and most important things you can be totally responsible for in keeping yourself healthy.
• Hand hygiene does not cost anything, does not take much time, but can have a big impact for lots of people.
• You can take this lesson home to your family and be a role model for them, too.

Other things you can do to keep yourself healthy:

• Eat healthy foods (make half your plate vegetables and fruits).
• Get enough rest and exercise.
• Drink plenty of water and limit sugary drinks.
• Have regular health checkups and immunizations.
FACULTY AND STAFF - Hand Hygiene Classes

• The school nurse can be the facilitator for a school-wide absenteeism prevention campaign that involves all staff as well as students.
• This campaign should include advocating for necessary facilities and supplies with the administration.
• Hand hygiene can also be included as part of an annual class on “Blood Borne Pathogens and Standard Precautions” that you could ask to teach to faculty and staff.
• Discuss the studies that have been done proving that an effective hand hygiene campaign at school can have a positive impact on absenteeism for students and staff.
• Teachers and other staff can serve as role models for students by their behaviors.
• They should provide time for appropriate hand hygiene and can take part in including these lessons in their normal curriculum.

When in doubt, wash your hands.

In general, you should always wash your hands:

• before and after touching a student’s face or mouth,
• after contact with wounds, secretions, mucous membranes and blood or other body fluids,
• after touching any object that is visibly contaminated or likely to be contaminated with secretions or body fluids,
• before caring for students and between direct contact with different students,
• after touching blood or body fluids or secretions when caring for a student and before proceeding to another care activity for the same student,
• before eating, drinking, smoking, applying makeup or handling contact lenses,
• after eating, smoking, coughing, sneezing or using the restroom.

Note: Wash hands before and after putting on gloves. Best practice recommends that gloves be used when changing diapers for preschool or special needs children. Gloves do not provide complete protection against hand contamination. Because of the increasing prevalence of latex sensitivity among medical personnel and others, the Food and Drug Administration has approved several powdered and powder-free latex gloves with reduced protein contents, as well as synthetic gloves. For more information on latex-free schools, visit the American Latex Allergy Association at www.latexallergyresources.org/articles-and-brochures.
Resources

Carson-Dellosa Publishing (enter ‘Health Education’ in search bar)
www.carsondellosa.com

Health Teacher
www.healthteacher.com

www.amazon.com/How-Survive-Teaching-Health-Activities/dp/0134251741

KidsHealth in the Classroom
www.kidshealth.org/classroom

www.amazon.com/Life-Skills-Ready-Use-Activities/dp/0787969591/ref=pd_sim_b_1

National Wellness Institute (click on Health Observances Calendar)
www.nationalwellness.org