

Together We Can Build Food-Safe Schools!

Strategy Sheet

Strategies for School Nurses

Not every school has a nurse; your school is lucky to have you! An outbreak of foodborne illness can fill your clinic fast – preventing illness is a top priority. You can prevent foodborne illness by helping your school nutrition team engage community partners in the school’s food safety efforts. You also can work with partners to detect illnesses early and quickly implement measures to prevent additional illnesses.

Food-safe schools adopt a school-wide approach to food safety, and, with the help of partners in the school community, can create a culture of food safety. Food-safe schools address a broad range of topics beyond the scope of what may be required by legislation. This starts with building and supporting strong food safety policies and procedures, and continues with education and training. Partners can help achieve the ultimate goal of making food safety second nature to everyone in the school community, thus creating a culture of food safety.

School Nurses Are Essential to Creating a Culture of Food Safety

- You have a unique perspective and can help develop and implement health education curricula.
- You play a key role in promoting prevention strategies, such as regular and proper handwashing.
- You are integrally involved with disability and allergy care plans.

Thinking About Food Safety

- Are you aware of your school’s existing food safety efforts? What is your role in these efforts?
- Can you quickly recognize the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction to food or a foodborne illness?
- If you could take some steps to enhance food safety, what would they be?

Take Action!

- Promote handwashing among students and staff. Handwashing – an oldie, but goodie! Leverage your role as the medical professional within the school to promote the importance of proper handwashing. Visit with individual classes to discuss the topic and provide demonstrations. Encourage administrators and custodial staff to keep hand sinks equipped with warm, running water, soap, and paper towels. Help teachers find ways to schedule handwashing breaks for students before meals.
- Verify that your school has a Food Allergy Action Plan. As a nurse, you know how devastating an allergic reaction to food can be. Is your school community prepared to prevent allergic reactions from occurring and respond to reactions when they do occur? Meet with your administrators and school nutrition team to ensure that your school’s plan identifies all students with food allergies, maintains an individualized emergency care plan for each student with a food allergy, and prepares others in the school community to prevent and respond to allergic reactions to food.
- Develop a recordkeeping system to track absences related to illness. Surveillance is critical to identify and track outbreaks of illness, including foodborne illness. Help your school develop *and use* a recordkeeping system to track absenteeism. The system should capture information to help identify symptoms, diagnoses, and treatments, etc. Review these records regularly to identify potential trends you may want to share with other partners. ■