

Emergency Preparedness

Position Statement

NASN POSITION

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that the registered professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as school nurse) provides expertise in school health and is a vital member of the school team who collaborates with community agencies to develop comprehensive emergency response procedures. The school nurse knowledgeable about the pathophysiology of physical and psychological trauma and is a valuable resource for the provision of health care and support in emergencies. (Kalekas, 2017).

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

“School nurses have a unique role to protect and serve the nation’s children whenever disaster strikes during the school day” (Kalekas, 2017, p. 458). Every day approximately 60 million primary and secondary aged students attend public, charter, or private schools in the United States (U. S. Department of Education [USDE], 2018). It is fundamentally important that school administration, school staff, parents, and students work together to promote and maintain a safe environment for students (Accredited Schools Online, n.d.; American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2015). While emergencies in the school setting are often unpredictable, those involved in the care of students should prepare to meet the needs of those students before, during, and after an event. Emergencies that may occur at school include:

- Student, staff and visitor health-related emergencies or injuries;
- Mass casualty incidents;
- Weather-related emergencies; and
- Hazardous materials emergencies (Cowell & McDonald, 2018; Kalekas, 2017).

Preparedness in schools is a process designed to protect students and staff from harm, minimize disruption, ensure the continuity of education for students, and develop and maintain a culture of safety. (National Integration Center, 2018). To maximize success, effective management of school emergencies requires training, preparation, and planning for best practices (Trust for America’s Health [TFAH], 2017).

Utilizing their expertise in assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation, school nurses provide valuable insights for the four phases of school campus/district emergency management: Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, Recovery (Doyle, 2013). The school nurse is a leader and integral partner with school staff and outside agencies in developing comprehensive school plans/procedures for injury prevention and first aid, facilitating evacuation, caring for students with special needs, performing triage, educating and training staff, providing surveillance, reporting (Doyle, 2013; Kalekas, 2017), and assisting survivors with their immediate psychological and emotional needs; and referral to appropriate mental health services for long-term support (Brymer et al., 2012; National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). School nurses recognize and respond to both minor and mass emergent situations thereby minimizing unnecessary delay in initiating an effective response (Cowell & McDonald, 2018; Hoffman & Silverberg, 2018). School nurses advocate for mass casualty triage and training that effectively addresses children’s unique physiology and psychological development (AAP, 2015).

SUMMARY

To optimize student health, safety, and learning, NASN advocates for a school nurse to be present in school all day, every day, and this presence is especially beneficial in planning for and responding to emergency situations. School nurses, as healthcare providers, are an essential member of the leadership team, bringing their unique perspective to optimization of all phases of school emergency preparedness (Davis-Aldritt, 2017).

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