

Medication Control in K–12 Schools



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Safe use of medications by students can present challenges for K–12 schools. Administrators must understand and comply with federal laws and regulations which define controlled substances, and state laws which govern how medications can be administered by health professionals in schools. The National Association of State Boards of Education's State School Healthy Policy Database (http://nasbe.org/healthy_schools/hs/bytopics.php?topicid=4110&catExpand=acdnbtm_catD) identifies state laws on the administration of medications, storage, and record-keeping requirements for public schools. Independent schools with health professionals may be guided by similar practices.

School policies related to medication use should address:

- **Authorization by parent or physician.** A written authorization from a physician or registered nurse is often required for school-based administration of prescription drugs to students. Written permission by a parent or guardian is often required for prescription and non-prescription drugs as well, although some states allow minors to make certain health care decisions on their own.
- **Administration by school nurses and other staff.** School nurses typically administer medications, provided they meet state education and licensing or certification standards. Adequately trained non-medical staff may be permitted to administer medications in limited circumstances. According to the National Association of School Nurses (www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsArticleView/tabid/462/ArticleId/21/Delegation-Revised-2010), the decision to delegate administration duties should be made by the school nurse in consultation with state law and after assessing the health needs of particular students.
- **Self-administration.** Some states allow students with a medical professional's written authorization to self-administer medication. Common self-administered medications include those for treating asthma, allergic reactions, and diabetes, as well as non-prescription drugs. School policies should include a system of accountability for students who have such privileges, and any exceptions or special instructions, such as student possession and self-administration of insulin or an epinephrine auto-injector.
- **Field trips and emergencies.** School policies should address the types of medications that school officials should carry on field trips. In addition, response plans are necessary for specific medical emergencies such as an allergic reaction or diabetic complications.
- **Over-the-counter and herbal medications.** Some schools keep a small supply of non-prescription medications for occasional need, but require parent permission for regular use. The administration of such drugs should balance concerns about managing the level of use and controlling student use or distribution to others.

- **Storage and record-keeping.** School policies should address the acceptance, storage, and disposal of prescription and non-prescription drugs. All medications should be clearly labeled, including dosage and student name. Consider how emergency medications may need to be prepared and stored in order to expedite care. Develop a system to dispose of or return unused or expired medications to parents at the end of the school year. Establish documentation requirements for administering medications and reporting adverse reactions or incidents.
- **Student confidentiality and reporting.** The school's policy should address the need to preserve student confidentiality in the administration of medications, as well as in related written and verbal communications. Consult with legal counsel to ensure that the school's policy complies with health privacy laws as well as the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, if applicable. In addition, schools or health professionals in most states are required to notify the health department of certain diseases as well as serious injuries and illnesses.

Resources

- National Association of School Nurses
Medication Administration in the School Setting
www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsArticleView/tabid/462/smId/824/ArticleID/86/Default.aspx
- American Academy of Pediatrics
Guidelines for the Administration of Medication in School
<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;112/3/697>

Sample School Policies, Manuals and Forms

- Burlison Independent School District
Medication Administration Procedures
www.burlisonisd.net/home/sites/burlisonisd.net/files/u4/Medication_Administration_Procedures.pdf
- Weatherford Independent School District
Guidelines for Administration of Medication at School
[http://web.weatherfordisd.com/HealthServices/Guidelines for Med Admin.pdf](http://web.weatherfordisd.com/HealthServices/Guidelines%20for%20Med%20Admin.pdf)
- Simsbury Public Schools
Administration of Medical Consent Form
www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/uploaded/District_Content/Health_Services/AUTHORIZATION_for_the_Administration_of_Medicine_Consent_3_2011.pdf
- State of Maine
Training of Non-Licensed Personnel in Medication Administration
www.maineceph.com/PDFs/medadmin.pdf

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