

MAINE ASTHMA COUNCIL

Schools Workgroup

ASTHMA SCHOOL HEALTH SURVEY - 2009

Highlights

We learned:

Who answered the survey?

- We sent out 616 surveys to Maine schools. In the end, we received 566 responses from 631 schools, for a response rate of 89.7 percent. Some surveys were only partly completed. For most questions, our response rate was around 87 percent
- Almost all the surveys (96.6 percent) were filled out by the school nurse. Exactly 2/3 of the nurses who answered (351 of 532) also worked in other schools.

How are schools staffed?

- Two thirds of schools share their school nurse with at least one other school. Almost a quarter of all schools (24.6 percent) are staffed by nurses who work in four or more schools.
- About 1/3 of the schools (33.8 percent) are staffed full-time or nearly full time. But almost half (45.4 percent) of schools have coverage for less than half the time One fifth have less than a day per week of nursing coverage.
- Elementary schools have a better rate of nurses to students than high schools, but have fewer actual days of coverage on average, because they are smaller.

Who handles asthma-related problems when the school nurse is not available?

- In 406 schools (70.7 percent) it is the school secretary. However, only 60.9 percent of schools with full-time or nearly full-time nurse coverage designate the secretary as back-up.
- In 134 schools (23.3 percent) it is the principal Moreover, the principal was the backup in 38.9 percent of schools where there was less than a day a week of nurse coverage.

Schools and regions vary a great deal in how much illness they see and how school nurses respond.

- School nurses reported 15,524 (9 percent) students with diagnosed asthma. *Aroostook public Health District had the highest share of students with asthma (12 percent), while Downeast reported the lowest share of students with asthma (6.7 percent).*
- Over one third of the children with asthma, 5,539 (3.4 percent of all students), have persistent asthma and need daily medication.
- Schools had asthma plans on file for 5,008 students (37.5 percent of students with asthma, and 3.1 percent of all students) although the plans were not always for the students the sicker students.

The Schools Workgroup

Maine Asthma Control and Prevention Program

Aroostook performed the best, with plans for 47.1 percent of students with asthma. *Schools in the Penquis District had the lowest share of students diagnosed with asthma who had plans (27.7 percent).*

- High school students are slightly likelier to have an asthma diagnosis (9.8 percent) than elementary school students (8.6 percent), but less likely to be on daily medications.
- Asthmatic high school students are significantly less likely to have an asthma plan (29.9 percent) than elementary school students with asthma (41.9 percent).
- On average, there was less than one student per school with a known diagnosis of diabetes, for a total of 594 students.
- Almost all students with diabetes had diabetes management plans (544, or 95 percent) .
- An average of 4.24 students per school, for a total of 2,216, had epi pens.

Policies and equipment related to asthma varied a great deal by region and school size.

- Having an asthma plan is not significantly correlated with nurse/student ratios.
- Larger schools, and schools with a higher proportion of students diagnosed with asthma, have lower rates of asthma action plan per student with asthma.
- Public health districts varied as much as twofold in the rate of adoption of 11 policies listed in the survey. *DownEast PHD was the lowest in almost every area (3.8). Cumberland (6.5), York (6.5), Aroostook (6.4) and Midcoast (6.3) were neck and neck in overall policy performance.*
- Top two: Almost all schools (96 percent) update health information annually, and 76 percent have peak flow meters.
- Bottom two: Only 17 percent of schools have an oxygen saturation meter, and 29 percent have a committee to address the indoor environment.
- The proportion of schools with a committee to address the indoor environment ranged from **51 percent of schools in Aroostook Public Health District** to *17 percent in Downeast Public Health District.*
- The larger the school, the likelier it was to have each of the policies and equipment. The only two exceptions were school staff training, which was likelier the smaller the school was, and having written emergency policies, which was not related to school size.

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