



MENTAL HEALTH GUIDANCE

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
HEALTH CENTER
RETURN TO SERVICES GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

As Fall 2020 approaches, school personnel, parents and students are all anticipating what “back to school” will look like during the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The MI Safe Start Plan and the MI Safe Schools Roadmap offer direction for a safe return to school in Michigan. Possible scenarios include full-time in-person instruction or a hybrid of in-person and online instruction for communities in MI Safe Start Phases 4, 5 and 6; and online instruction only (required if a community is in MI Safe Start Phase 1, 2 or 3). For more information, view the [MI Safe Start Plan](#) and the [MI Safe Schools Return to School Roadmap](#).

Whether schools re-open for in-person or online-only instruction, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Child & Adolescent Health Center program is positioned to support school staff, students and parents by providing safe, quality care to young people through various models of care: clinical Child and Adolescent Health Centers (CAHC), School Wellness Programs (SWP), Behavioral Health Sites (BHS) and Enhancing, Expanding Emotional Health (E3). Although mental health services may be delivered differently, continued service delivery during the pandemic is critical to ensuring support for student health and learning.

The MDHHS CAHC program staff, together with the School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan and over 30 representatives from funded program sites across the state, convened a series of work groups to examine and plan for potential challenges to service delivery during this transitional time. This brief is a result of that work, and is intended to help you plan for considerations to mental health service delivery during the pandemic. While some information pertains more specifically to school-based programs, school-linked CAHCs may also find service delivery impacted and can glean valuable guidance from this brief. It is recommended that you review the CAHC Communications with Schools guidance for valuable information on identifying your role and communicating with clients, families and school staff throughout the pandemic; and the Return to School Administrative Guidance for Q&A on topics related to program requirements.

Remember that while your program offers a valuable resource to your school community, you may not be able to meet all of the mental health needs you encounter. Be prepared to prioritize need and offer support to clients, families and school staff by identifying and sharing referral resources that can help meet mental health needs that go beyond your program’s capacity.

WHAT CAN WE OFFER?

Ask your school partners what you can do to support them as they transition back to school, as well as when potentially transitioning between Safe Start phases. Identifying issues and concerns that schools need assistance with can help you clarify what you can offer, and what limitations or boundaries exist. Also be sure to ask for what you need from your school partner. This opens the door to brainstorming solutions in areas where gaps exist between needs and resources for either party.

Reduced attendance, staggered schedules, building closures, a focus on core academic subjects coupled with a reluctance to release students from class, or other factors may all negatively impact your ability to deliver services. However, opportunities also exist to make the case for and deliver services based on the needs of your target population. Mental health interventions including individual therapy, psycho-education, training and other support services may not only be welcome, **but imperative**, to those who may have difficulty coping, or who have witnessed others coping in negatives ways, with the many changes brought on by the pandemic. The Roadmap encourages schools to offer social-emotional skill building to students, and **staff training** on topics such as trauma-informed best practices, identification and referral of at-risk students, and self-care. Consider how you can best respond to the needs of your target population and the call to provide mental and social-emotional health support for your school partners. You do not have to directly provide all education, training and services, but you can lend your expertise to identifying appropriate resources for your school community.



- Social-emotional skill-building, including classroom management support
- Coping skills and strategies to identify and manage stress
- Self-care strategies
- How to identify and refer students who may be in need of social-emotional support services
- Process for referrals for school staff and/or families who may need services
- Sample tip sheet on Helping Parents Identify Potential Need for Mental Health Services for their Children

MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING RESOURCES

Should they decide to implement the Roadmap recommendation to provide mental health screening to all students and staff in Safe Start Phases 1-5, schools may seek your support in selecting appropriate mental health screening tools and in developing screening processes. The following resources may help you identify appropriate tools and processes:

- [Center on Positive Behavioral Health Interventions & Supports](#)
- [SAMHSA: Ready, Set, Go, Review: Resources for Screening for Behavioral Health Risk in Schools](#)

PROCESSES FOR IN-PERSON APPOINTMENTS

There is no getting around the fact that service delivery will look different than in the past in all but Safe Start Phase 6 (post-pandemic). To accommodate for those differences, consider the following in preparation for in-person appointments:

- Develop, disseminate and explain policies and procedures regarding appointment scheduling and walk-in services to reduce the number of clients in the program space at any given time.
- With your fiduciary agency and school administration and school health teams, determine any necessary screening processes (temperature checks, screening questions) prior to appointments.
- Clearly identify if pre-screening questions and/or temperature checks are required by your program prior to client visits, and who is responsible for conducting the screening.
- Clarify if screening by program staff is expected prior to client visits. If program staff are expected to administer screening questionnaires and/or take temperature checks, staff should be properly trained in these procedures by their fiduciary agency prior to doing so. Advise the school of your process.
- If appointment reminders will be sent (by mail or electronically, with or without pre-screening questions included), or if your clerical support staff will call in advance for pre-screening, take precautions to protect confidentiality for clients seeking minor-consented services (those services that minors can consent to on their own behalf under state or federal law).

MENTAL HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR CHILD & ADOLESCENT HEALTH CENTERS IN MICHIGAN

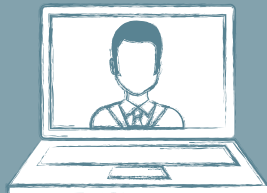
- School secretaries or other school staff should not send appointment reminders or make reminder calls for your program's mental health visits.
- Develop standards for use of PPE (personal protective equipment) by program staff and clients during appointments, which may include but not be limited to the use of clear masks and/or face shields. Your fiduciary agency, school administration, school health teams, and local health department can all contribute to the development of these standards.
- Make sure clients understand expectations for use of masks, hand washing or hand sanitizing, **prior** to their appointments.

Remember that, under the Roadmap, schools can implement stricter requirements than what is in place under the Safe Start Plan e.g., schools can require that masks be worn by everyone in the building, even though the Safe Start Plan might only recommend doing so, depending on the Safe Start Phase your community is currently in. In these cases, your school-based programs should honor the stricter school requirements. Additionally, you should know that Local Health Departments will be working closely with school Superintendents in every community to guide them through requirements and recommendations in each phase of the pandemic, and will be an important resource for your program as well.

PHYSICAL (SOCIAL) DISTANCING

If the space where therapy is provided is small, leaving you without the minimum recommended distance (6 feet) between you and your clients:

- Consider removing furniture or other large items to free up space.
- Explore the possibility of securing a larger space to deliver services on either a temporary or permanent basis (space should allow for services to be provided confidentially).
- Explore the provision of services via telehealth and of offering adjusted (evening) hours, especially in Safe Start Phases 1-3 (online instruction only).



For more information and resources, visit the [CAHC Tele-Mental Health Services website](#)

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Under the guidance of your fiduciary agency, assess the physical space where services are provided and make necessary accommodations to continue safe and successful service delivery throughout the pandemic. Your fiduciary agency should provide you with specific guidance for establishing and maintaining a safe physical environment. For example, guidance should cover each item below such as, but not limited to: what items to sanitize, what sanitizing equipment and materials to use and how often to sanitize.

- Assess what type of items to keep in space where therapy is provided (e.g., furniture).
- Consider reducing toys and other items in space where therapy is provided.
- Consider asking students to bring in their own items and/or labeling items for each client and storing in individual bags.
- Sanitize items after every use if items are not disposable.
- Stagger appointments to allow enough time between clients for cleaning and sanitizing.
- Consider having only staff open and close doors for clients, leading client in and out of areas of service provision, to minimize handling of this high-touch surface.
- Explore the use and installation of angel lights, UVC lamps, air filtration systems and Plexiglas. *School-based programs should consult with school administration before making any permanent or semi-permanent structural modifications to school property.



CRISIS RESPONSE PLANNING

Finally, it is important that the fiduciary agency has a crisis response plan and that providers know and understand this plan, as well as where they fit in the school crisis response plan (if at all). With this in mind, consider the following actions:

- Review current crisis response plans with your fiduciary agency and with the school's Crisis Response Team.
- Consider revisions to include crisis response for clients who are not onsite, such as when providing therapy services by telehealth.
- Clarify responsibilities of each party named in the crisis response plan.

CRISIS RESPONSE PLANNING RESOURCES

- [CAHC Individual Student Crisis & Emergency Response Plan Guidance](#)
- [CAHC Response to School-Wide Crises Best Practice Guidance](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center: "After a Suicide" Toolkit for Schools](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

- [CASEL Reunite, Renew and Thrive: SEL Roadmap to Reopening School](#)



For assistance with policy development or for sample policies related to provision of mental health service delivery, please contact your MDHHS CAHC Agency Consultant or CAHC Mental Health Consultant