



# Mott Poll Report

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## Handling Child Health Needs During the School Day

Parents rely on school personnel to keep their children safe and healthy during the school day. This can range from applying basic first aid, to dealing with common child health conditions such as asthma, to identifying and addressing mental health issues. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 6-18 years about how their child's school handles health and safety situations.

Overall, 77% of parents are very confident that their child's school would be able to give basic first aid to a student bleeding from a cut. Parents are less confident about schools' ability to respond to a student having an asthma attack (58%). Only 38% are very confident in schools' ability to assist a student suspected of having a mental health problem. Consistently, parents of elementary students express higher levels of confidence compared to parents of middle/high school students (Figure).

Parents believe school nurses deal with most health problems at their child's school. The majority of parents (63% elementary; 70% middle/high school) say the school nurse would be most likely to provide first aid to a student bleeding from a cut. Similarly, 60% of elementary parents and 63% of middle/high school parents say the school nurse would be most likely to respond to a student having an asthma attack. Classroom teachers and school secretaries are mentioned less often as being likely to handle these situations.

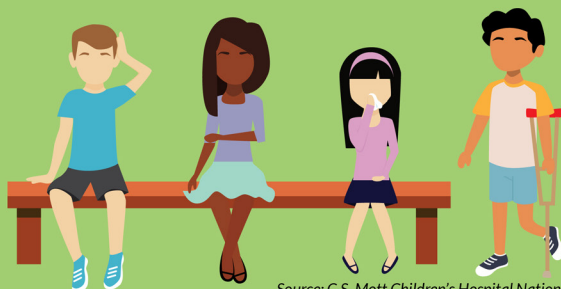
Parents are less clear about who would assist a student suspected of having a mental health problem. Parents of elementary students cite the school nurse (38%), the classroom teacher (13%) and other staff (21%); however, 28% don't know which staff members would handle this situation. Parents of middle/high school students name school counselors (49%) as the staff most likely to assist a student suspected of having a mental health problem, followed by the school nurse (24%) and classroom teacher (8%); 16% don't know who would handle this situation. Only 15% of elementary parents and 14% of middle/high school parents say their child's school screens students for mental health problems.

Roughly 3 in 5 parents believe a school nurse is onsite at their child's school 5 days a week (61% of elementary parents, 57% of middle/high school parents). Parents who believe a school nurse is onsite 5 days a week report higher levels of confidence in the school's ability to handle health and safety situations.

### Parents' confidence in the ability of their child's school to handle various health situations

Percent of parents who are very confident

|   | Elementary School | Middle/High School |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Give first aid                              | 84%               | 70%                |
| Respond to an asthma attack                 | 63%               | 54%                |
| Assist with suspected mental health problem | 45%               | 32%                |



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2017

### Report Highlights

Among parents of children age 6-18:

Parents are more confident that their child's school can provide first aid (77%) than assist a student having an asthma attack (58%) or a mental health problem (38%).

Parents view school nurses as most likely to provide first aid or handle an asthma attack, but are less sure about which staff would assist with mental health issues.

Parents may overestimate the amount of time a school nurse is onsite at their child's school.

## Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in May 2017 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents age 18 and older (n=2,051). Adults were selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,195 parents who had at least one child age 6-18 years. The margin of error is ±3 to 5 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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## Implications

Although some parents may assume that children's health and safety needs will be managed during the hours they spend at school, this Mott Poll indicates that many are not fully confident in the capabilities of their children's schools to address a range of health issues that may arise.

Most parents were very confident that basic first aid, such as putting a bandage on a student bleeding from a cut, would be handled well by their child's school. Yet for some parents, their confidence was linked to the presence of a school nurse: those who reported that a school nurse is onsite at their child's school 5 days/week, nearly all were very confident that basic first aid would be handled well, compared to only three quarters of parents who reported less consistent availability of the school nurse.

However, parents may be overestimating the amount of time the nurse spends at their child's school. Three in five parents in this Mott Poll, consistent at both the elementary and secondary levels, assume their child's school had a nurse onsite 5 days per week. However, recent data from the National Association of School Nurses indicates that fewer than half of US schools have full-time nurses, with substantial variation by region.

When the school nurse is not available every day, parents recognize that classroom teachers or the school secretary are often called on to handle everyday health situations. While staff with no medical training may be sufficient for basic first aid needs, they are likely to be less capable in handling health situations related to a student's chronic disease, such as an asthma attack, epileptic seizure, or serious allergic reaction. Results of this Mott Poll indicate that parents recognize the difference between handling an urgent medical situation and providing basic first aid, reporting substantially lower confidence in the ability of their child's school to respond to a student having an asthma attack. With estimates that 1 in 4 of US children has a chronic condition, it's a given that every school will have at least a few students with special health-related needs. Parents of these children will want to work directly with school personnel to understand the onsite availability of school nurses, and to ensure non-medical staff are prepared to handle health-related situations that may arise.

Parents have the least confidence in schools' ability to help a student who may have mental health problems, and are unclear about which school staff might handle that responsibility. About half of parents with children in middle or high school say the school counselor would be most likely to handle mental health issues. Yet school counselors have many competing demands and large student caseloads, making it difficult to establish personal connections with every student. School counselors also have varying levels of training in how to identify potential mental health problems. Only 15% of parents say their child's school has any type of screening for mental health problems. Parents may want to learn more about how their child's school works to identify and support students struggling with mental health issues, and advocate for increased funding and training if the current resources are insufficient.