



School Health Index

The School Health Index (SHI) is a self-assessment tool and a planning procedure for improving school health that was developed by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) over a period of 10-15 years in collaboration with health care workers, community leaders, and scholars throughout the country. The SHI consists of a series of tools that help schools through structured step-by-step activities. At the school level a group of administrators, teachers, parents, and community members join together to become the SHI team and implement the SHI. The team identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses of current school policies and programs by completing eight modules that include school health and safety, health education, physical activity, nutrition, health services, counseling services, health promotion for staff, and family and community involvement. Upon completion of the eight modules, the SHI team identifies and prioritizes action plans that the school can use to remediate their weaknesses. This assessment is critically important, because improving a school's health and safety can reduce school absenteeism, increase physical and mental fitness, and allow students to learn and retain more information.

Why use SHI?

Promoting healthy and safe behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools, which is to provide young people with the knowledge and skills they need to become healthy and productive adults. Improving student health and safety can:

- Increase students' capacity to learn,
- Reduce absenteeism, and
- Improve physical fitness and mental alertness.

The School Health Index (SHI): Self-Assessment & Planning Guide was developed by CDC in partnership with school administrators and staff, school health

experts, parents, and national nongovernmental health and education agencies for the purpose of:

- Enabling schools to identify strengths and weaknesses of health and safety policies and programs,
- Enabling schools to develop an action plan for improving student health, which can be incorporated into the School Improvement Plan, and
- Engaging teachers, parents, students, and the community in promoting health-enhancing behaviors and better health.

There is growing recognition of the relationship between health and academic performance, and your school's results from using the SHI can help you include health promotion activities in your overall School Improvement Plan.

The SHI has two activities that are to be completed by teams from your school: the eight self-assessment modules and a planning for improvement process. The self-assessment process involves members of your school community coming together to discuss what your school is already doing to promote good health and to identify your strengths and weaknesses. The SHI allows you to assess the extent to which your school implements the types of policies and practices recommended by CDC in its research-based guidelines for school health and safety policies and programs.

After you complete the self-assessment process, you will be asked to identify recommended actions your school can take to improve its performance in areas that received low scores. This step will help you to decide on a handful of actions to be implemented this year. Completing the SHI is an important first step toward improving your school's health promotion policies and practices. It is important to know what the SHI is and what it is not.

The SHI is a...	and not a...
Self-assessment and planning tool	Research or evaluation tool
Community-organizing and educational process	Tool for auditing or punishing school staff
Focused, reasonable, and user-friendly experience	Long, bureaucratic, painful process
Process that identifies no-cost or low-cost changes	Process that requires expensive changes
Process that provides justification for funding requests	Process that identifies unfunded mandates

Resources

The SHI is available at no cost, and we help facilitate the whole process. Many of the improvements you will want to make after completing the SHI can be done with existing staff and with few resources that we will do our best to help you to secure. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in students' improved health, safety, and readiness to learn. For those priority actions that do require new resources, your SHI results can help provide information needed to stimulate school board and community support for school health and safety, and can provide data and justification to support funding requests.

Health Topics

The current edition of the SHI covers the following five health topics:

- Safety
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Tobacco use
- Asthma

These topics were chosen because these health behaviors can play a critical role in preventing the leading causes of death, disability, hospitalizations, illness, and school absence. CDC has developed guidelines or strategies for schools to address each of them.

Physical inactivity, poor eating habits, and tobacco use are primary causes of the chronic diseases – such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes – that are the leading causes of death in our nation. These risk behaviors are typically established during childhood and adolescence, and the physiological processes that lead to chronic diseases can also start in youth. Unfortunately, more children and adolescents are

overweight than ever before, and more than one in three high school students currently uses some kind of tobacco product.

Unintentional injuries and violence are the leading causes of death and disability among children, adolescents, and young adults. Major causes of unintentional injuries include motor-vehicle crashes, drowning, poisoning, fires and burns, falls, sports- and recreation-related injuries, firearm-related injuries, choking, suffocation, and animal bites. Types of violence are homicide, suicide, assault, sexual violence, rape, child maltreatment, dating and domestic violence, and self-inflicted injuries. Children and adolescents engage in many behaviors that increase their risk of injury. These include not using seat belts, driving after drinking alcohol, carrying weapons, and engaging in physical fights. Safety-related behaviors are those that can help prevent unintentional injuries and violence.

Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalizations and a leading cause of school absences. On average, in a classroom of 30 children, about three are likely to have asthma. The impact of illness and deaths due to asthma is disproportionately higher among low-income populations, minorities, and children in inner cities than in the general population.