

Healthy Youth!

School Health Index (SHI) Introduction

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. You will then be guided through a simple process for prioritizing the various recommendations. This step will help you to decide on a handful of actions to be implemented this year. Finally, you will complete the School Health Improvement Plan to list your steps in planning the implementation of your recommended actions. Completing the SHI is an important first step toward improving your school's health promotion policies and practices. Your school can then act to implement the School Health Improvement Plan and develop an ongoing process for monitoring progress and reviewing your recommendations for change.

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

SHI Modules

The items in the SHI are based on CDC's research-based guidelines for school health programs, which identify the policies and practices most likely to be effective in improving youth health risk behaviors. The SHI is structured around CDC's eight-component model of a coordinated school health program (CSHP). This model highlights the importance of involving all eight components, which can have a powerful impact on student health behaviors. The eight modules in the SHI correspond to the eight components of a coordinated school health program. The eight modules are:

1. [School Health and Safety Policies and Environment](#)
2. [Health Education](#)
3. [Physical Education and Other Physical Activity Programs](#)
4. [Nutrition Services](#)
5. [Health Services](#)
6. [Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services](#)
7. [Health Promotion for Staff](#)
8. [Family and Community Involvement](#)

Resources

The SHI is available at no cost, and the assessment process can be completed in as little as five hours. Many of the improvements you will want to make after completing the SHI can be done with existing staff and with few or no new resources. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in students' improved health, safety, and readiness to learn. Some states and counties have provided financial support to cover school costs in implementing the SHI (e.g., refreshments for meetings and staff stipends) and to help schools implement actions recommended in the School Health Improvement Plan.

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. Additional health topics will be added in future editions.

- [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.

Additional information on physical activity, nutrition, tobacco use, asthma, unintentional injury, and violence among young people can be found in the [Health Topics](#) section of the Web Site for CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, Healthy Youth. More detailed information on the relationship between health and academic performance can be found in the CD-ROM, Making the Connection: Health and Student Achievement, produced by the Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education and Recreation and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers (see [Resources for school health and safety](#)).

Scorecards

Module scorecards display your score for the module, and the overall scorecard displays your scores at a glance for all the modules. The scores assigned to your responses enable you to identify your strengths and weaknesses. You will use the module and overall scorecards as the basis for completing the Planning Questions section below the module scorecard and the School Health Improvement Plan.