

**SECTION XI:  
SAFE SCHOOLS**

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# PLANNING FOR SAFE SCHOOLS IN NEW MEXICO

## Introduction

In New Mexico, as well as the rest of the nation, school districts are looking at strategies to keep students, staff and faculty safe in schools. On the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) website are template documents to help schools in New Mexico develop Safe School Plans. [www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/) . The templates are in compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and their Incident Command Structure (ICS). The Safe Schools Plan will guide you in setting up a command structure that will work for any emergency situation.

Safe Schools is part of Coordinated School Health Programs (CSHP). CSHP is a framework for linking health and education. The focus is healthy and successful students. There are eight components of CSHP: health education; physical education and activity; nutrition; social and emotional well-being; healthy and safe environment; health services; staff wellness; and family, school and community involvement.

NMAC 6. 12.6, School District Wellness Policy, requires school boards, school districts and charter schools to develop and implement policies which address student and school staff wellness through a coordinated school health approach. The requirement for school-level safety plans at each school facility focuses on supporting healthy and safe environments. Plans must include: prevention, policies and procedures; emergency response (including tactical emergency response plans); and recovery.

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.012.0006.htm>

“The goal of the **SAFE SCHOOL PLAN – PREVENTION** section is to provide direction for school staff for preventing potential harmful situations.” [www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/)

“The goal the **SAFE SCHOOL PLAN – POLICIES AND PROCEDURES** section is to provide direction for school staff for intervening in potential harmful situations.”

[www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/)

“The goal of the **SAFE SCHOOL PLAN – RESPONSE** section is to assist schools in preparing for potential emergency situations.” [www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/)

“The goal of the **SAFE SCHOOL PLAN – RECOVERY** section is to assist schools in coping with the aftermath of a traumatic incident.” [www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/sfsb/tools/)

Other topics which are important to include in a Safe School Plan are:

## INJURY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

### Introduction

“Injuries are the number one cause of death in children and young adults.”

<http://nmhealth.org/Injury/index.shtml> For example, a young child is at greatest risk for sustaining an injury during play, while an adolescent or young adult is most at risk of injury in a motor

vehicle crash. Injury is a major problem in New Mexico where Hispanics, Native Americans and African Americans are at higher risk for injury and subsequent disability than their white counterparts. .

### **Unintentional versus Intentional Injury**

Injuries can be intentional or unintentional. Intentional injuries are inflicted by people on others-- usually through violence. Domestic violence, sexual assault, and gun violence are all intentional injuries with a victimizer and a victim. Examples of unintended injuries include motor vehicle crashes, poisoning (from legal and illegal drugs), and falls (usually associated with the older population). <http://nmhealth.org/Injury/index.shtml>

Children and teens need practical information about injury prevention. Injuries and their prevention strategies which need to be addressed range from bike and motor vehicle safety to drug abuse prevention to the complex arena of violence prevention. For most types of injury there are evidence-based strategies to prevent or minimize injuries. Successful injury and violence prevention strategies involve the school, students, parents, and other community representatives.

As children start school they also may be exposed to various levels of bullying, harassment, and physical violence in the community. Family rules, school policies, and laws need to address a number of issues including:

- Bike and skateboard helmets
- Seat belts
- Prescription and over-the-counter drug safety
- Toy safety
- Bullying, harassment, and violence
- Prescription drug safety

Teens face challenges as they increasingly seek independence. A young person's need for independence is normal but risky behaviors in unsafe environments can lead to injury. Young people need support, respect, guidelines, rules, mentors, safe places to learn and socialize, and supervision.

Risk-taking is a part of growing up but the risks can be minimized with passage and enforcement of evidence-based policies and programs that address:

- Car safety
- Bike and skateboard helmets
- Gun storage and safety
- Prescription and over-the-counter drug safety
- Alcohol use and binge drinking prevention
- Illegal drug use prevention
- Bullying and harassment prevention
- Healthy relationships (including emotional health and sexuality)
- Intimate partner violence/teen dating violence
- Emotional health and suicide prevention

<http://nmhealth.org/Injury/youthparents.shtml>

## **INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE**

Violence is a major public health problem that disproportionately affects youth and minorities. Adolescents, in particular, confront violence and abuse in many environments that were traditionally viewed as safe havens such as the home, school, and community. Patterns of violence are learned behaviors; early family influence is significant. Poverty, racism, and the lack of social justice continue to be root causes of violent behaviors. Alcohol, other drugs, and the availability of firearms also contribute to violent behavior.

Aside from their own homes, youth spend the majority of their time at school. Since the school is a vital socialization agent, the school environment is important in injury and violence prevention. The environment includes everything from the safety of the physical plant to the degree of mutual respect among students, teachers, and other school personnel.

Multiple strategies are required for fostering a healthy school climate such as policies and procedures that support student achievement and reduce academic failure or violence, violence prevention initiatives, and collaboration with outside agencies to provide a broad spectrum of services to the school community.

### **Violence Prevention and Community Collaboration**

Schools have taken a leadership role in violence prevention, but the most successful efforts are achieved with a comprehensive community-wide program. Prevention measures have the following characteristics:

- Training in and positive reinforcement for the use of negotiation and conflict resolution skills by students and staff.
- Barriers eliminated between different groups, and communication improved among youth, teachers, administrators, and parents.
- Peer-led mediation and violence prevention education that is integrated into comprehensive health education for all students.
- Respect for the opinions of youth regarding why violence exists; why they feel the need to protect themselves; what they believe schools can do to promote safe learning environments; and what changes would promote the health of the entire school community.
- Outreach to media and other community groups for help in addressing the problem of violence in the community as well as the school.
- Parent involvement with students and staff to improve communication and mutual support.

### **Types of Interpersonal Violence**

This section describes the most common forms of interpersonal violence and makes suggestions for what school staff can do as prevention and intervention strategies. Various types of violence often overlap. Anyone who was a witness to violence was a victim of violence, whether or not they were physically touched. There are thousands of untreated victims of violence in New Mexico who need assistance in the form of school-based mental health services such as counseling, support groups, or substance abuse treatment.

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.012.0007.htm>

## **Child Abuse and Neglect**

See information in Section III.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence affects all members of a family and may take many forms including physical and sexual violence, forced isolation, belittling verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and the restriction of access to money, transportation, and other resources. Domestic violence is experienced in families of all socioeconomic groups, educational levels, ethnic or religious groups, and sexual orientations.

Interviews with children, from homes in which domestic violence has occurred, indicate they are almost always aware of the violence and respond to the violence in a variety of ways. Many develop behavioral problems, either acting out aggressively or internalizing their distress in depression, withdrawal, eating disorders, and/or substance abuse. Often children who witness violence develop stress-related illnesses or sleep disturbances. Some suffer from inadequate health care because of the abuse. Domestic violence may interrupt or delay a child's emotional and cognitive development and affect school performance.

### What Schools Can Do

- Educate school personnel about domestic violence, including how to identify and assist children living with domestic violence.
- Develop a policy for protecting the safety of families experiencing or fleeing domestic violence, and for supporting students living in shelters.
- Organize a peer education and support program that trains youth to educate classmates about gender roles, respectful relationships, and nonviolent conflict resolution.
- Inform parents and students about the warning signs of domestic violence and community resources for battered women and their children.

## **Youth Violence**

Violence may occur inside or outside school. Manifestations may range from escalation of verbal threats to physical conflict and gang fighting, resulting in severe injuries or death.

Youth violence is a symptom of a larger illness in our culture that views youth as problems rather than as resources. Scientific data tells us that many young people, despite difficult social and family circumstances, continue to demonstrate significant resiliency, the ability to bounce back from adversity. One of the key elements in fostering resiliency is the on-going presence of at least one caring adult in the life of a young person. Many of the successful violence prevention programs create a network of contact between young people and caring adults, a place where the creative energies of youth can be channeled in meaningful ways.

### What Schools Can Do

- Provide school-wide training in violence prevention and conflict resolution.
- Implement comprehensive, age-appropriate curricula on self-esteem improvement and violence prevention, including issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia.
- Develop a violence prevention plan that includes input from students, staff, and parents.

- Participate in community-based violence prevention coalitions.
- Adequate adult supervision and modeling is critical.

## **Teen Dating Violence**

Teen dating violence refers to behaviors that include intimidation and physical violence between young people in a relationship. Intimate partner violence and teen dating violence can be described as a pattern of behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their partners. The violence may or may not be sexual in nature. The violence is used to control, dominate and undermine the victims self esteem. Victims can be male or female—though most victimizers are male. Such behaviors include insults, embarrassment, rumors, name-calling, suspicion, or belittlement, as well as physical and sexual violence. Teen dating violence is an important public health problem. The following are some key statistics\*:

- 72% of 8th and 9th graders reportedly “date”
- 1 in 4 adolescents report verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from a dating partner each year.
- About 10% of students nationwide report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.

\* <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/TeenDatingViolence2009-a.pdf>

Teen dating violence can lead to severe injury or death. Violence and harassment may increase when the victim tries to end the relationship. Teen dating violence crosses all racial and ethnic lines and is found in all religious groups and social classes.

### What Schools Can Do

- Educate school personnel about the warning signs of dating violence and how to respond.
- Develop a confidentiality policy to protect the safety of students or staff who disclose abuse, and to guide decisions about informing parents.
- Keep detailed records of any in-school incidents, disclosures, or injuries in case a student later takes legal action.
- Collaborate with a local battered women’s program to provide preventive education for junior and senior high school students as part of the school’s comprehensive health education program.
- Inform students, parents, and staff about the warning signs and the community resources for abused or abusive youth.

## **Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault is violence and violation acted out by sexual means. Approximately 100,000 cases of child sexual abuse are confirmed annually in the United States. New Mexico confirms approximately 600 cases of child sexual assault each year. It is generally accepted that these figures are significantly less than the actual incidence of abuse.

Rape and other sexual assaults are serious violent crimes that have devastating long-term effects on the lives and health of survivors. The overwhelming majority of all reported sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor, and most sexual assaults occur in a home setting. Data collected by rape crisis centers show that fewer than 20% of attackers are strangers. Sexual assault occurs in all racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups, as well as in the heterosexual, gay, and lesbian communities. Nationwide, it is estimated that one in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18, and many survivors typically do not report the assault to police or to a health care provider.

Sexual abuse among adolescents occurs in the context of a cycle of coercion and threat of violence known generally as “battering”. Teen battering can set the stage for coercive sex later. When teens explore their own feelings about sexuality and dating, they try to make sense of societal messages about sex, messages from their families and peers, and their own feelings. After a sexual experience, a boy or girl may begin to wonder about whether he/she was abused. He/she may turn to trusted peers or adults who can facilitate a teen’s exploration of his or her experience and feelings, and appropriate action to take. Efforts to deal with sexual assault should address the need for sensitive, timely, and appropriate services for survivors and their families as well as the need for preventive education and increased community awareness about the dangers of sexual assault.

#### What Schools Can Do

- Provide school personnel with training on issues of sexual assault.
- Establish a pre-K through 12 protocol that sensitively covers all issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment, including reporting, disclosure, referrals for services, and confidentiality.
- Incorporate age-appropriate information on sexual assault into comprehensive health education programs and school-based health center intake forms.
- Increase awareness of rape crisis center services by posting information in key locations such as rest rooms, locker rooms, and administrative, counseling, and school health offices.

#### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment in schools is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention from peers, subordinates, supervisors, customers, or anyone the victim may interact with in order to fill job or school duties, and that interferes with a student’s right to pursue an education or to participate in school programs and activities. Harassment behavior includes grabbing or touching body parts, pulling up dresses or pulling down pants, making sexually explicit comments or jokes either verbally or in writing, making unwanted sexual gestures or using sexual words or names, exposing the genitals, or pornography.

#### What Schools Can Do

- Train staff to recognize harassment and be familiar with appropriate interventions.
- Establish explicit policies and grievance procedures to stop harassment.
- Give victims the opportunity to talk about their experiences.
- Provide individual counseling for perpetrators to help individual students and to improve the school’s climate.

## **Unintentional Injuries**

Unintentional injuries may result from the interaction between a child's developmental stage, a particular product or environment, and lack of parental or school awareness of a child's abilities. For example, motor vehicle-related injuries are a concern for children of all ages. However, the cause of injury is related to a child's age and abilities. Preschoolers are most often injured as occupants or as pedestrians in driveways, elementary school children as pedestrians or bicyclists, and adolescents as drivers or passengers. This section contains descriptions of the most common causes of injuries to children, and strategies for schools to be involved in prevention and intervention.

## **Playground Safety**

Playgrounds may present hazards that could have a devastating impact on a child. Children's play includes risk-taking. Children may not know the limits of their own physical development. This puts those children moving into new play spaces (typically at ages 3 and 6) at highest risk.

### What Schools Can Do

Playgrounds should not contain items that can cause injury in the natural course of play. The most critical areas to address include the following:

- Promote safe play through classroom lessons, student-developed rules, and trained playground monitors.
- Require school personnel to track playground injuries.
- Develop a system for equipment maintenance, replacement, and/or removal.
- Provide access for children with disabilities.
- Design the playground to allow children to move safely from one activity to another through proper spacing between equipment and other structures.
- Check that the surfaces under equipment provide an adequate depth of impact-absorbing materials such as sand, wood chips, pea gravel or solid rubber mats.
- Follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions.
- Repair or remove all hazards.
- Remove visual barriers, position adults for optimum view, and promote rules regarding safe play.

## **Pedestrian Safety**

Pedestrian injuries are the leading cause of death in children ages 4 to 8. With increased responsibility for getting to school and play areas on their own, children ages 5 to 9 are most likely to be injured as pedestrians. Children are less able to judge the speed and distance of oncoming vehicles, and they have a narrower field of vision.

### What Schools Can Do

- Teach pedestrian safety in the classroom every year.
- Model safe pedestrian behaviors by school personnel.
- Develop pedestrian policies for the school community.

- Encourage parent participation in teaching and reinforcing safe pedestrian behaviors.
- Promote involvement of municipal and community agencies in creating and enforcing pedestrian-related traffic laws.

### **Bicycle Safety**

Most bike-related deaths result from head injury, and most injuries involve falls or collisions with objects, pedestrians, or other cyclists. Use of approved bike helmets can reduce head injuries by 85%. Unfortunately, only an estimated 15% of children ages 14 and under wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.

#### What Schools Can Do

- Teach bicycle safety in the classroom every year.
- Encourage the purchase and use of bicycle helmets.
- Develop a helmet use policy for students who ride bicycles to school.
- Organize bicycle rodeos.
- Invite local retailers to provide incentives to children observed wearing helmets.

### **Fire and Burn Safety**

Fires and burns are the third leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 14 and under. Smoke detectors are extremely effective at preventing fire-related death and injury. The chances of dying in a residential fire are cut in half when a working smoke detector is present.

Scalds, while rarely fatal, are very common among preschoolers. Hot tap water, beverages, and food are the most likely agents. Burns may be caused by contact with cigarette lighters, home heating devices, and other hot appliances.

#### What Schools Can Do

- Teach children fire exit procedures.
- Teach children how to call for emergency help.
- Use local fire prevention officers as resources in classroom activities.
- Refer students with fire-setting behavior to appropriate services.

### **Motor Vehicle Safety**

Every year, thousands of children are tragically injured or killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes. In fact, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children age 3 and older in the United States. Securing your children properly in age and size appropriate child safety seats - in the back seat of your vehicle - is the most effective thing you can do to protect them in the event of a crash. (NHTSA, 2008) Adolescents age 15 to 19 are at highest risk both as occupants and drivers; alcohol and speed often are factors. Safety belts provide the greatest protection against ejection from a vehicle during a crash; three-fourths of occupants who are totally ejected from passenger vehicles during crashes are killed. <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/CPS>

#### What Schools Can Do

- Provide age-appropriate instruction in passenger safety.

- Develop school policies that reinforce the New Mexico mandatory seatbelt law for drivers and front-seat passengers.
- Work with local law enforcement and community groups to increase compliance with the law.
- Sponsor alcohol-free school social activities.

### **School Bus Safety**

School buses are associated with relatively few injuries and deaths. Children ages 4 to 7 are at highest risk of injury, with two-thirds of the deaths occurring as children get on or off the bus.

#### What Schools Can Do

- Educate children and parents about safe bus-riding behaviors.
- Develop appropriate bus pick-up and drop-off policies.
- Work with local traffic enforcement officers to ensure adherence to bus-related traffic laws.

### **Sports**

Participation in sports can improve physical fitness, coordination, self-esteem, and teamwork. The majority of sports injuries are from falls, being struck by an object, or overexertion. Team sports are the most frequent cause of sports injury, while individual sports are responsible for the most severe injuries. It has been estimated that half of all organized sports-related injuries among children could be prevented through the use of rules, protective equipment, and safer playing environments. Concussions can occur in *any* sport or recreation activity. So, all coaches, parents, and athletes need to learn concussion signs and symptoms and what to do if a concussion occurs. As of February 2010 all school districts in New Mexico are required to have a Concussion Protocol. <http://legis.state.nm.us/Sessions/10%20Regular/final/SB0001.pdf>

See [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org) *Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports*

#### What Schools Can Do

- Require coaches to be trained and certified in each sport they coach.
- Require coaches to use only New Mexico Activities Association (NMAA) approved sports physical form. <http://www.nmact.org/>
- Require, maintain, and improve protective equipment.
- Require helmets and mouth guards for all contact sports.
- Develop clinics that assist athletes and coaches with training and conditioning.

## **SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A safe and healthy school environment is critical to successful education. Evidence exists to suggest that substandard school environments impede learning. Substandard is defined as schools that lack appropriate heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems, have

poor lighting or acoustics, are badly maintained, or have other environmental problems. It is known that students in “poor” buildings score 5 to 10 percentile rank points lower on standardized tests than do students in functional buildings.

The school environment also has positive and negative affects on teachers and other staff. Connection exists between the condition of school facilities and teacher retention, and it has been suggested that the teacher-retention benefits of facility improvement can be equal to or greater than those from pay increases.

A school’s physical environment is known to influence its social climate. Students and staff interact more constructively in an environment that is orderly, clean, and safe. The quality of facilities has an effect on factors such as student attitudes toward school, self-esteem, security, comfort, and pro-social behavior, which in turn affect learning and achievement. Providing well-maintained, hygienic, and safe school buildings should be a priority.

## **GUIDELINES**

### **Indoor Air Quality**

Addressing indoor air quality (IAQ) in buildings can be challenging and complex. Key methods for controlling indoor air quality include: reducing exposure from identified negative sources, ensuring adequate ventilation, and implementing air cleaning. An IAQ management plan that has both technical and administrative provisions is recommended for every school.

The Environmental Protection Administration’s (EPA) premier resource for schools is its *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools* kit, which provides schools with information and guidance on carrying out a practical plan of action to improve indoor air problems at little or no cost, using straightforward activities and in-house staff. It’s available at <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools>.

Three major factors affect the quality of air in schools:

- heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC);
- microbial contamination; and
- respiratory irritants (i.e., vapors, gases, particulates).

The approach to resolving IAQ problems in schools and public buildings is generally twofold:

- improving ventilation to dilute and remove environmental pollutants; and
- reducing or eliminating exposure opportunities from materials that may be adversely affecting indoor air quality.

### **Mold Growth**

Mold and other microbial growth can have a pronounced negative impact on indoor air quality. At a minimum, the following conditions are necessary to support mold growth in an indoor environment.

- mold spores
- nutrients necessary to support mold proliferation
- adequate temperature

- moisture

Of these conditions, moisture is the only factor that can realistically be controlled to prevent microbial growth in the indoor environment. Microbial agents proliferate in warm, moist environments and often can be found in:

- humidification systems;
- crawl spaces beneath buildings;
- damp carpets and furnishings;
- water-damaged/poorly draining air-conditioning systems;
- poorly maintained ventilation systems; and
- moist areas where organic matter (such as paper, books, or dirt) is present.

Identifying and removing materials colonized by mold, as well as locating the source of moisture, are important first steps toward reducing possible indoor air pollutants. Merely replacing moldy materials without identifying and repairing the moisture source is likely to result in new mold growth. Nonporous materials such as cement, tile, metal, stone, and some hard plastic surfaces can be cleaned with the application of an appropriate antimicrobial agent (0.5% bleach solution) and subsequent cleaning with soap and water.

Porous materials such as paper, cloth, cardboard, ceiling tiles, carpeting, and insulation are more difficult to remediate. Recommendation is to dry porous materials with fans and heat within 24 to 48 hours after they become wet to prevent mold growth. Once growth has begun, adequate cleaning is not possible and affected items and materials should be replaced.

When moisture is a periodic problem, non-carpet flooring is recommended. If carpeting is necessary, it should be readily removable (e.g., carpet tiles, throw rugs). For further information on mold and mold cleanup, consult "Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings" (U.S. EPA, 2001), available at [http://www.epa.gov/molds/mold\\_remediation.html](http://www.epa.gov/molds/mold_remediation.html).

## **Temperature Standards/Weather Safety**

### **Indoor Standards**

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) standards recommend that adequate heat be provided in all places of employment from October 15 through May 15 and that indoor temperatures be maintained at a minimum of 66° F and no warmer than 78° F.

### **Outdoor Standards**

Weather watch guidelines on outdoor temperature comfort and safety issues can be accessed <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf>

Outdoor play is an important part of the school daily curriculum, as weather permits. It is important for parents to provide the appropriate clothing and outerwear for the weather conditions (e.g., coat, snow pants, boots, gloves, etc.). Extra hats and mittens may be kept on hand at school, but if used by multiple students, hats should be cleaned when used by a different student.

Buildings and shade trees can provide shelter from cold wind and hot sun. When determining whether to take students outside or not, the following guidelines should be considered.

If temperatures fall below 10° F (30° F for infants and toddlers), children should be kept indoors, however, wind factor should be considered when monitoring temperature for outdoor activities. Typically, it is best to wait until later in the day for outside activities when temperatures have climbed above morning lows. It is also important to be aware that time outside for children are usually considerably shortened in cold weather. Appropriate dress should always be a consideration as well.

As temperatures/heat index approach 100° F (95 ° F for infants and toddlers), staff should verify real outdoor temperature through a reliable monitoring system when considering outdoor activities. In hot weather water play activities outside in shady areas of the playground are an alternative. Sufficient hydration to replenish body fluids should be encouraged, and sun screen should be either provided by the school or parent/guardian.

Typically, the length of time spent outside is decreased in hot weather and takes place early in the morning or late in the day when the sun is less intent. Sun-smart behavior information can be found at the following websites: [www.cancernm.org](http://www.cancernm.org) and [www.cdc.gov/ChooseYourCover](http://www.cdc.gov/ChooseYourCover) .

### **Humidity Standard**

The recommended comfort range for indoor relative humidity is 40% to 60%, but for buildings in New Mexico, periods of much lower relative humidity are often unavoidable. The sensation of dryness and irritation is common in a low-humidity environment. Scrupulous cleaning practices can minimize common indoor air contaminants and their irritant effects, which are exacerbated by low relative humidity.

Drinking water during the day can also help ease some symptoms associated with a dry environment, such as throat and sinus irritations. Humidifier use is discouraged, since these devices can harbor mold and other microbes if not adequately maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

### **Outdoor Air Safety**

#### **Air Quality Conditions**

Certain students and staff with compromised lung function may be especially susceptible to changes in outdoor air quality due to nearby industrial sites or nearby forest fires as well as long-burning fires at a distance.

When dealing with such circumstances consideration should be given to reminding these individuals of the following issues.

- Strict adherence to controller medication regimen.
- Frequent bathing, especially at bedtime, to remove smoke/containments from hair and clothing.
- Close medical monitoring for individuals with significantly compromised lung function.

Outdoor air quality resources include <http://www.lungusa.org/> and <http://nmfireinfo.wordpress.com/>

### **Clean Air Zone/Bus Idling**

The clean air concept at school aims at reducing the amount of exposure to diesel exhaust by discouraging idling of school buses and other vehicles and encouraging use of alternative fuels on school property. A goal of this concept is to provide a healthier outdoor environment by improving air quality in and around school buildings and throughout the community. One of its challenges may be to seek funding for cleaner fuels for school buses, to purchase cleaner models and to retrofit existing buses with newer emission control technologies. Educational tools using this concept can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus/> and at [http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air/educ\\_tools/clean\\_air\\_zone\\_idaho/index.cfm](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air/educ_tools/clean_air_zone_idaho/index.cfm) . Another resource is <http://www.pscleanair.org/programs/dieselsolutions/> .

Diesel exhaust is known to aggravate asthma, allergies, emphysema and bronchitis, and the US Environmental Protection Agency has concluded that it is probably a carcinogen. Idling vehicles of those picking up students at school emit fine particulate matter and other pollutants; bus idling and queuing can further add to these concentrations of particulates both inside school buses and inside adjacent buildings, especially if windows are open.

Some actions by school administration to reduce exposure of students to vehicle exhaust in the school setting include the following.

- Establish guidelines to reduce or eliminate idling of buses and vehicles.
- Park buses away from student's gathering places and building vents.
- Enforce no-idling policies with parents and other vehicle users at school, especially at student pick-up and drop-off times.
- Create a clean air zone around the school to comprehensively reduce student's and staff's exposure to air pollution.

## **Pest Infestations**

### **Mice, Insects**

Classrooms may contain unrealized conditions that attract rodents and insects. Use of food or food containers in student art projects, collections of food containers, poor storage of food containers, eating in classrooms, and other activities that leave food residues can attract pests.

Rodent infestation can affect indoor air quality. Mouse urine contains a protein material that can produce symptoms such as running nose and skin rashes in exposed individuals. When rodent wastes are present inside HVAC system components, an unfiltered ventilation system can distribute these materials throughout the area it feeds. Proper filters need to be installed in the HVAC system to reduce the potential for this problem.

A 3-step approach is necessary to remediate/eliminate rodent infestation.

- Remove rodents.
- Clean waste products from the interior of the building.
- Reduce/eliminate pathways/food sources that attract rodents.

Removal of rodents and follow-up cleaning may not provide immediate relief, since allergens can linger for several months afterward; however, once the infestation is eliminated, a combination of cleaning and increased ventilation and filtration should serve to reduce rodent-associated allergens.

### **Birds Roosting Inside Building Structures**

The roosting of birds within a school building is a concern because exposure to bird wastes can cause disease (see also “Animals in School” section, next), including diseases of the respiratory tract, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, and psittacosis (bird fancier’s disease). Certain molds associated with bird wastes are of concern for immunocompromised individuals, who have an increased risk of health impacts following exposure. These impacts may also occur in healthy individuals.

Cleanup methods depend on the amount of waste and the types of materials contaminated. Accumulated bird wastes may require the services of a professional cleaning contractor. In less severe cases, contaminated nonporous materials may be cleaned with a disinfectant solution of sodium hypochlorite (CDC, 1998). Porous materials contaminated with bird waste should be examined by a professional restoration contractor, who can determine whether the material is salvageable. Where a porous material has been colonized with bird waste, it is recommended that the material be discarded.

The protection of both the cleaner and other occupants present in the building must be considered as part of the overall remedial plan. Where cleaning solutions are used, the cleaner must be trained in the use of personal protective methods and equipment. Proper training and practices must be adopted to prevent exposure to cleaning chemicals as well as spread of disease because the cleaning process may result in aerosolization of particulates that can spread to occupied areas via air currents or ventilation systems.

### **Use of Pesticides**

In New Mexico the Public Education Department regulates pesticide use in the school setting, and requires each school district to develop procedures for implementation of pest management with consideration for reducing the possible impact pesticide use can have on human health and the environment.

The following guidelines from for those procedures are adapted from the NM Administrative Code 6.29.1.9, subsection O, <http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.029.0001.htm>

- No pesticide may be applied to public school property and no pest control device as defined in the New Mexico Pesticide Control Act may be used on public school property except those pesticides and devices currently registered for legal use in the state by the New Mexico department of agriculture.
- No pesticide may be applied to public school property except by those persons certified in the applicable category and currently licensed by the New Mexico department of agriculture or by employees under their direct supervision.
- Pesticides will only be applied in or on the outside of school buildings when a pest is present and will not be applied on a regular or “calendar” basis unless it is to treat an infestation and is a part of a pest management system being implemented to address a particular target pest. A pest is considered to be present when it is observed directly or can reasonably be expected to be present based on finding evidence such as droppings, body parts, or damage that is typically done by the pest. This section of the regulation does not apply to pre-construction termite treatments or the use of outdoor herbicides.

- Pesticides that are applied in a liquid, aerosolized, or gaseous form through spraying, aerosol cans, bombs, fumigation, or injections into the ground, foundation, or plants will not be applied on public school property when students, staff, or visitors are present or may reasonably be expected to be present within 6 hours of the application. In emergency cases where a pest infestation threatens the health and/or safety of the occupants of public school property, and which requires the immediate application of a pesticide to remediate, students, staff, and other school occupants will be removed from the treatment area prior to the application. Small amounts of gel or liquid pesticides applied to cracks and crevices or baits used to treat pest infestation are exempt from this section.
- At the beginning of each year, and when new students register, schools will develop a list of parents and guardians who wish to be notified prior to pesticide application during the school year. These parents/guardians will be notified in writing prior to pesticide application. General notification of anticipated pesticide applications will occur by posting or dissemination of notices or oral communication or other means of communication. In emergency cases where a pest infestation threatens the health and/or safety of the occupants of public school property, no pre-notification is required. Immediately following the application of a pesticide in emergency cases, signs will be posted indicating an application was made.
- Written records of pesticide applications will be kept for three (3) years at each school site and be available upon request to parents, guardians, students, teachers, and staff.

Before resorting to using pesticides as a means of eliminating pests from school buildings, the following steps should be considered to reduce or eliminate pathways/food source:

- Avoid using food products in student artwork.
- Rinse recycled food containers, and store them in sealed receptacles to prevent rodent access.
- Remove nonfood items that rodents are consuming.
- Store foods in tight-fitting containers.
- Avoid eating at workstations. In areas where food is consumed, vacuum periodically to remove crumbs.
- Remove crumbs and other food residues from ovens, toasters, toaster ovens, microwave ovens, coffee pots, and other food preparation equipment on a regular basis.
- Examine and seal holes in rooms and exterior walls. Holes as small as ¼" are sufficient for rodents to enter. If doors do not seal at the bottom, install a weather strip as a barrier. Reduce harborages (e.g., cardboard boxes) where rodents may reside.

Additional information regarding pesticide exposure at schools can be found at these web sites: [www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm) , <http://www.ipminstitute.org/> .

## **Animals in School**

### **Risks and Hazards**

Animals in schools, whether kept in classrooms as pets or brought for a short time as part of an educational presentation, pose risks of allergic reactions, disease transmission, and bites. Because of these risks, keeping animals in schools is discouraged. Some basic guidelines regarding the setup for housing animals in a public setting in regards to disease prevention can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5605a1.htm> .

Guidelines specific to the school setting for housing animals are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5605a5.htm> .

All warm-blooded animals can cause allergic reactions. Certain individuals, in particular those with asthma, may be allergic to animal fur, dander, body fluids, or feces. Furthermore, individuals can become sensitized (made allergic) by repeated exposure to animal allergens (U. S. EPA, 2000). Allergen particles become airborne and accumulate in carpets, upholstery, and fabrics and lurk on books, desks, and walls. When inhaled into the nose and lungs, they can cause a range of allergies and illnesses such as allergic rhinitis, asthma, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, and chronic sinus and ear infections. In the eyes, they can result in conjunctivitis; on the skin, they can cause itchy rashes, eczema, and hives.

Allergen removal does not immediately stop allergy problems because allergen particles can be carried through a central ventilating system, contaminate an entire school building, and persist for months of routine cleaning. Steam cleaning and vacuuming with a HEPA-filter-enhanced vacuum cleaner may reduce, but not totally eliminate, allergens. Molds, mildews, bacteria, and insects can also result if cages or other habitats are not cleaned properly and frequently.

The serious issue of exposure to rabies and other zoonotic diseases (those transmitted from animals to people) in school classrooms is addressed in Chapter 8. Complete recommendations for schools are available on the DPH website at the following web site <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/rabies/schoolprotocol.htm>.

Some of the most common animal hazards are summarized below.

- **Baby chicks and ducks** pose high risk of salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis, and transmission of these diseases from chicks and ducklings to children is well documented. *Recommendation:* These animals are inappropriate for schools.
- **Parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels** can carry psittacosis, a bacterial disease that can cause fever, chills, rash, and pneumonia. *Recommendation:* Children should not handle these birds.
- **Reptiles (including nonpoisonous snakes, lizards, and iguanas) and amphibians** may intermittently shed *Salmonella*, and negative cultures will not guarantee that the animals are not infected. *Recommendation:* Special handling precautions are necessary, and handling by young children is not recommended.
- **Wild mammals** pose a risk for rabies. *Recommendation:* These animals should never be brought into a school. Detailed information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats.html> and at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/kidsrabies/> .

### General Precautions

Schools can take the following measures to protect classroom occupants from hazards associated with animals in the school setting.

- Discourage the practice of keeping animals in school.
- Use alternatives to animals, when possible, for educational activities.
- Before bringing any animals into school, ask parents about allergies.

- Consult with school nurse about student allergies or sensitivities (privacy laws may limit the information that health officials can disclose).
- Locate sensitive students away from animals and habitats.
- If possible, have all animals checked for disease by a licensed veterinarian prior to introducing them into a classroom.
- Document a current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian for all dogs, cats, and ferrets brought onto the school campus for instructional purposes.
- Clean cages and habitats frequently and thoroughly.
- Locate animals away from ventilation system vents to avoid circulating allergens throughout the room or building.
- Keep animals in cages as much as possible; do not allow them to roam.
- Instruct students on safe and proper handling procedures.
- Stress the importance of avoiding hand-to-mouth/eyes/nose contact until hands are thoroughly washed.
- Make sure that students who assist with pet cleaning and maintenance, or who touch visiting animals, wash their hands thoroughly after all contact with animals and animal environments.
- Instruct teachers and other staff to follow proper handwashing procedures.
- If students “foster” animals during school vacations, caution them to keep these class pets indoors to avoid the possibility of contact with wildlife and rabies.

### **Rabies Specific Precautions**

Specific measures to prevent rabies include the following; review of these measures can easily be incorporated in different aspects of school curriculums.

- Do not handle wild animals and stay away from wild animals and domestic animals of unknown origin.
- Feed pets indoors and do not discard food wastes outdoors in close proximity to the house.
- Contact animal control officials for advice if wild or unknown domestic animals are lurking nearby and acting sick or abnormal.
- Supervise pets and obey leash laws.
- If a pet is bitten by another domestic animal, contact the pets’ owner and verify rabies vaccination if possible. If unable to do so, contact veterinarian and local animal control officials.
- The following guidelines should be followed for bites and scratches by any animal of unknown rabies vaccination status.
  - Wash wounds and contact areas thoroughly with soap and water.
  - Contact medical resources for immediate evaluation and report to NM Department of Health at (505) 827-0006.
  - Report incident to animal control officials and provide description of animal, including any abnormal behavior.
  - Try to keep animal confined, but do not risk further injury in doing so.
  - Keep other away from potential contact with animal in question.

### **Hazardous Walking Conditions**

New Mexico has established standards in rules for determining hazardous walking conditions for students relating to school bus transportation issues, accident prevention and student safety. They state that no school bus route shall be maintained for lesser distance than: (1) one mile one way for students in grades kindergarten through six; (2) one and one-half miles one way for student in grades seven through nine; and (3) two miles one way for students in grades ten through twelve. (See <http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.041.0003.htm>)

### **School Sanitation and Preventative Maintenance**

In the school environment, proper sanitation and preventative maintenance consists of maintaining the building free of conditions that could lead to transmission of disease or cause injury. All School Districts shall develop and implement a preventive maintenance plan meeting the requirements of this section.

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.027.0003.htm>

### **Disposable Gloves**

Disposable gloves provide a protective barrier against germs that cause infections (see earlier section of this chapter on Latex for a discussion concerning latex gloves). They should be provided to any staff persons who may handle body fluids or feces. Gloves should be properly disposed of after use in the regular waste receptacle. Gloves are *not* a substitute for handwashing. Hands and other skin surfaces should be washed immediately and thoroughly if contaminated with body fluids.

### **Disposal of Medical Waste**

Schools have a responsibility for disposing of infectious or physically dangerous medical waste generated in school settings “The generator of a special waste shall assure that the special waste is disposed of in a solid waste facility permitted to accept the special waste or treated at a permitted facility, prior to disposal, to render it a non-special waste.”

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title20/20.009.0008.htm>

### **School Hygiene/Infection Control**

School safety plans at each school building are to be focused on supporting healthy and safe environments should including but not necessarily limited to: prevention, policies and procedures, and tactical emergency response plan;

<http://www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/nmac/parts/title06/06.012.0006.htm>

- Addressing the spread of germs in schools is essential to the health of our youth, our schools, and our nation.
- Approximately 1/5 of the U.S. population attends or works in schools. (U.S. Dept of Ed, 1999).
- Some viruses and bacteria can live from 20 minutes up to 2 hours or more on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. (Ansari, 1988; Scott and Bloomfield, 1989)
- Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone. (CDC, 1996)

[http://www.shea-online.org/Assets/files/IHI\\_Hand\\_Hygiene.pdf](http://www.shea-online.org/Assets/files/IHI_Hand_Hygiene.pdf)

<http://nmhealth.org/H1N1/school/September%202009%20steps%20for%20nm%20schools%20final.pdf>

Please note the following three specific recommendations for rigorous hand hygiene programs in schools to prevent H1N1 transmission in the school setting:

1. Keep school bathrooms appropriately stocked.
  - Ensure student and staff bathrooms have soap and paper towels/hand dryers.
  - Implement programs in all schools to routinely monitor and restock the bathrooms.
2. Install and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer in classrooms and cafeteria.
  - Hand sanitizer used in class rooms has proven efficacy in disease prevention.
  - Instruct students and staff to use sanitizer when leaving or entering classrooms and after coughing or sneezing.
3. Educate and promote hand hygiene in schools.
  - Place signs in bathrooms, classrooms, and hallways to remind students and staff to wash and to use good cough and sneeze etiquette.
  - Educate teachers and all school staff of the importance of good hand hygiene.
  - Handwashing and/or hand sanitizing should be done frequently by everyone.

[http://nmhealth.org/H1N1/school/Rigorous%20Hand%20Hygiene%20Programs\\_Links%20to%20Posters.pdf](http://nmhealth.org/H1N1/school/Rigorous%20Hand%20Hygiene%20Programs_Links%20to%20Posters.pdf)

### **Toilets and Lavatories**

403.1 Minimum number of fixtures; of the International Plumbing Code (IPC) states; Plumbing fixtures shall be provided for the type of occupancy and in the minimum number shown in [Table 403.1](#) For the Education setting there shall be 1 restroom for every 50 male students, 1 restroom for every 50 female students. In New Mexico the state has adopted the Universal Plumbing Code but the ICP is used locally. <http://www.americanrestroom.org/code/index.htm#upc>

### **Drinking Water Fountains**

403.1 Minimum number of fixtures; of the International Plumbing Code (IPC) states; Plumbing fixtures shall be provided for the type of occupancy and in the minimum number shown in [Table 403.1](#) For the Education setting there shall be 1 water fountain for every 100 students. <http://www.americanrestroom.org/code/index.htm#upc>

### **Sewage Disposal**

All liquid and solid human wastes must be disposed of directly into an appropriate sewage disposal system, connected to either a municipal system or a subsurface onsite sewage disposal system. The latter is regulated by DEP (310 CMR 15). It is extremely important to ensure that the system is maintained free of leaks and backups, to avoid the spread of disease through exposure to contaminated or toxic sewage.

### **Outdoor Safety**

## Playgrounds

The National Program for Playground Safety recommends compliance with the playground safety guidelines set forth in the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) publication *Handbook for Public Playground Safety* <http://cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf>. Because nearly 70% of playground injuries are related to falls onto the surface of the playground, cushioned surfaces beneath and around equipment — at depths appropriate to equipment height — can reduce occurrence and severity of these injuries. (See Chapter 13 for additional information.) Playgrounds also need to be inspected. Manufacturers' recalls, warnings, or updates should be observed, and CPSC warnings should be taken into consideration.

Some things that need to be checked regularly, even weekly, include:

- the depth of loose-fill cushioned surfacing, such as wood chips or pea gravel, that may have been displaced through use;
- accessibility paths such as rubber mats or poured synthetic surfaces, which may need to be swept to remove debris such as sand, dirt, or loose-fill surfaces displaced from adjacent areas;
- trash in and around the playground, including protruding glass, can lids, sharp rocks, metal, and other items; and
- damage to equipment, such as broken or missing handrails, guardrails, steps, or signs.

Other things that should be checked monthly, quarterly, or annually include:

- There may be compaction or deterioration of loose-fill surfacing materials such as wood chips, pea gravel, or sand. Loads of additional materials may be needed to provide adequate cushioned surfacing.
- Equipment may be broken or have loose, worn, or missing parts. All parts, even plastic, can break. Check for sharp points, corners, or edges. Closely inspect bolts, welding points, moving parts, and protective caps or plugs, and replace if needed.
- Trip hazards may be created by settling of equipment, usage, or vandalism. A general walk-through may reveal exposed concrete footings or anchoring devices, rocks, roots, or uneven surfacing materials.
- Wooden equipment may have splinters, large cracks, or deterioration. A wood preservative, applied once a year, will help protect against deterioration. Preservatives should meet both CPSC guidelines and American Society for Testing & Materials (ASTM) standards.
- Metal might rust or deteriorate. Metal equipment may need to be repainted periodically. All paints and other similar finishes should have no more than 0.06% lead by dry weight. Playground equipment that was purchased prior to 1978 may need testing for lead paint unless the manufacturer documents that non-lead paint was used.
- Drainage in the playground area may be inadequate. Water should not collect under or near equipment, especially under slide and swing areas, where ice could form and cause falls.

Most maintenance of equipment involves making sure the equipment's surfaces and mechanical workings are safe. However, other aspects need to be considered. General safety points include:

- No openings on playground equipment should measure between 3.5 inches and 9 inches, because openings of this size range present an entrapment hazard.
- There should be no V-shaped openings or open areas close to the top of slides where strings or ropes could get caught and cause strangulation.
- There should be no more than 2 swings in a bay or support structure, and those swings should be at least 24 inches apart at the seat base and 30 inches from the side supports.

- All S-hooks should be closed. Mechanisms on teeter-totters and other equipment that could pinch fingers should be closed.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf>.

### **Weather Safety (wind chill, heat exposures, lightening)**

Each year, Americans cope with an average of 10,000 thunderstorms, 2,500 floods, 1,000 tornadoes, and 6 deadly hurricanes. Some 90% of all presidentially declared disasters are weather-related, leading to approximately 500 deaths per year and nearly \$14 billion in damage (National Weather Service, 2001). Schools are responsible for safeguarding students and staff from weather hazards ranging from potentially deadly storms to extremes of heat or cold. Schools need to plan ahead to determine when and whether students will be allowed outside for recess and/or released from school. Recess periods should not take place outdoors when weather conditions are extreme. For guidance on wind chill and heat exposure, see the following website: <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf>.

Schools should have written guidelines about the release of students (FEMA, 2006). For example, children should not be permitted to wait outside for the bus during lightning storms or heavy rain with flashflood watches or warnings. School buses can be swept away by as little as 6 inches of water. Releasing students may put them at greater risk than keeping them in the safety of the building. School staff can effectively monitor weather conditions with a NOAA weather radio, which costs about \$40.

Lightning is a major cause of direct weather deaths. In the U.S., lightning casualties (deaths plus injuries) most commonly occur in open fields, including ballparks and playgrounds (Curran et al., 1997), and the activity with the fastest-rising lightning casualty rate is outdoor sports and recreation. Thus it is especially important for coaches, referees, and leaders of other outdoor activities to practice lightning safety and for schools to have an effective integrated lightning safety plan (Roeder & Vavrek, 2006). Recommendations on lightning safety for schools developed by the Lightning Safety Group (LSG) of the American Meteorological Association are available online through the Lightning Injury Research Program of the University of Illinois at Chicago at <http://www.uic.edu/labs/lightninginjury/ltfaq.htm>.

Additional websites that provide helpful guidelines for dealing with severe weather conditions and weather emergencies are:

- <http://www.butlercountyohio.org/ema/pdf/tornado%20info%20for%20schools.pdf>
- (tornadoes); and
- <http://www.disastercenter.com/schools.htm> (links to information on hurricane and earthquake preparedness for schools).

### **Sun Safety**

Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation during childhood plays a role in future development of skin cancer, but the majority of U.S. schools were not designed with sun safety in mind. CDC recommends that sun protection be considered in the design of new schools and that, where possible, existing structures be modified by constructing roofs on dugouts, installing covers for bleachers, using awnings and tarps, and planting shade trees.

In some cases, construction of permanent shade structures is not an option. In such cases, *Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer*, published by the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (available at

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5104a1.htm>), suggests the following measures for improving the sun safety of schools:

- Purchase and install portable or add-on shade structures, possibly through the support of school/community partnerships.
- Plant shade trees, with student participation, possibly as part of science instruction.
- Establish rules that encourage the scheduling of outdoor activities (including athletic and sporting events) during times when the sun is not at peak intensity.
- Encourage parents to apply sunscreen to their children in the morning and include it in their children's supply kits. (This is especially important for field trips and other times children will be outside.)
- Seek community partnerships to provide free or reduced-cost sunscreen for staff and students. (Parent/guardian consent for sunscreen application by school personnel may be required.)
- Provide hats and other protective clothing for persons who forget to bring their own.
- Reinforce awareness with visual and audio messages via posters and public-address system announcements.

Educational materials, tips, and daily UV index information by ZIP code are available from EPA's UV Index website, <http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html>. (See the "Kids" section for both interactive and printable explanations of UV Index levels.)

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