



# Lessons learned from a school-based telehealth program and its importance during the COVID-19 pandemic

Karen Smith, MD, MEd

Medical Director, Global Services and School-Based Telehealth Program  
Children's National Hospital, Washington, DC

Margarita Arroyave-Wessel, MPH

Program Manager, Telehealth  
Children's National Hospital, Washington, DC

**Purpose:** Provide schools immediate access to top pediatric experts via telemedicine

**Background:** In 2019, Children's National Hospital established a school-based telehealth program (SBTP) in Washington, DC; the first of its kind in the region.

The SBTP provided an onsite school nurse and pediatric telehealth access to a private school with 185 students including 20 national and international boarding students.

- Physician telehealth service
- Health education provided using a hybrid model: virtual and in-person.
- Weekend medication administration

Criteria for utilizing telehealth and metrics were created. Reported monthly using a utilization dashboard.

During the pandemic, the value of collaboration with a pediatric hospital was highlighted as the SBTP pivoted to provide local schools access to top experts in COVID-19, infection control, and assist with the services needed to safely reopen.

## Outcomes:

### Pre-COVID

Successful program participation with 100% of the boarding population and 91% of day students.

- Six health education events: 4 virtual and 2 in person.
- 15 specialty care referrals and multiple hospital admissions.

### During COVID

Transitioned to advisory role for school closing and school re-opening.

- Staff and parent webinars on COVID-19 and MIS-C
- Developed COVID screening protocol
- Provided on-site COVID PCR Testing: a total of 3,029 COVID-19 tests were collected onsite at 4 schools.
  - Nasopharyngeal swab and saliva samples
  - Included students with developmental disabilities
- School re-opening plan review
- School consultation: weekly meetings to answer questions and create an individual plan based on local/state/national recommendations for school reopening



Hybrid Health Education: Virtual and In Person (pre-covid)



## Lessons Learned:

- Engagement and support of the school nurse is vital for ensure successful implementation and utilization.
- Schools provide an opportunity to extend specialized health services and improve care management for children with chronic health needs.
- The pandemic highlighted the need for schools to partner with pediatric experts and hospitals to help navigate through the health emergency.
- Flexibility and rapid redesign of services is vital.
- Telemedicine is an important tool for collaboration with schools to optimize health and navigate through health emergencies.