**By Nicole Villalpando, Austin American-Statesman**

Posted Aug 13, 2019 at 10:57 AM

School nurses do everything from checking temperatures and administering medication, to handling life-threatening emergencies and to talking through anxiety and school aversion.

How can parents best work with their school nurses? We asked some nurses at last year’s training what information they’d like parents to give them and how parents can be better partners in their child’s care.

* [**Follow our tips to take a great first day photo**](https://www.palmbeachpost.com/zz/entertainmentlife/20190813/back-to-school-follow-our-tips-to-take-great-first-day-photo)

**Make sure your contact information is updated** online (if your district has an online emergency contact form) and also on paper (if they don’t have the online form or the power goes out).

**Make sure your child knows your phone number and the phone number of a few more people to call in an emergency.** It’s not enough to have it in their phone. Their phone might not be charged at that moment.

**Answer the phone when the nurse calls you, and have a plan for what to do if your child needs to go home.** Have a backup person who can pick up your child if you’re not available, and make sure that your backup person is on the emergency contact form.

* [**How to pick the right backpack**](https://www.palmbeachpost.com/zz/entertainmentlife/20190809/back-to-school-how-to-pick-right-backpack)

**Know that a school nurse cannot diagnose**. They can make a suggestion of what they think might be going on, but you have to take your child to a doctor to receive a diagnosis and treatment. The school nurse also is not your primary care clinic. However, sometimes school nurses might notice things that a teacher or parent has not, and often, they know what ick is going around.

**Follow the 24-hour fever-free rule to return to school.** Our nurses understand that parents have to work, but giving a kid Tylenol or Advil to get the fever down doesn’t qualify as being 24-hours fever-free. It has to be 24 hours fever-free with no assistance. This is for your child’s safety as well as other children’s, to stop the spread of disease. Remember last year’s flu season, when some districts had classrooms with very few kids in them? Let’s try to avoid that this year.

* [**Get kids with food allergies ready for back to school**](https://www.palmbeachpost.com/zz/entertainmentlife/20190809/get-kids-with-food-allergies-ready-for-back-to-school-with-these-tips)

**For very young kids, put a clean pair of pants and underwear in their backpack and keep them there all year.** Make sure your child and your child’s teacher know where those clothes are. Nurses often have to send kids home or find clothes in the lost-and-found or try to clean up kids after an accident.

**Share medical information with the nurse.** They want to know if your child has a chronic illness, what medication your child is on and how much, what food or other allergies your child has and what to do if she has an attack, and what mental health diagnoses your child might have. If you think the teacher or the counselor has this information, don’t assume it’s filtering down to the nurse. It can be beneficial to sign a record-sharing request for your child’s doctor’s office to send over medical information.

**Let the nurse know if there has been flu, strep or another communicable disease.** The school districts’ health departments are required to share numbers with the state and even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those numbers start with the school nurse and can help establish a pattern of where and how quickly a virus is moving.

* [**Follow these tips for back-to-school shopping**](https://www.palmbeachpost.com/zz/entertainmentlife/20190806/follow-these-tips-for-back-to-school-shopping)

**Share the 504 plan or individualized education plan with the nurse.** The teachers, counselors and administration might know it, but the nurse also should be informed, especially if it’s for behavior, physical health or mental health. They want to know what works with your child. They also want to know if the behavior that has caused your child to go to the nurse is normal for them. If your child regularly has panic attacks, that’s helpful for the nurse to know if your child comes in with shortness of breath.

**Let the nurse know about a long-term medical condition that might mean homebound services will be needed.** Sometimes the school nurse gets tasked in getting assignments for kids who can’t attend school.

**Have the right paperwork for giving a child medication.** If your child needs to take medicine while at school, most districts won’t let you just give the kid the pill bottle. There will be paperwork involved that comes from your doctor if it’s prescribed or from you if it’s over the counter. Each district has its own set of guidelines. Ask your nurse what you need to provide, and know that she can’t give your child anything if the paperwork is not filled out properly.

* [**Teachers’ advice on what to do before the school year begins**](https://www.palmbeachpost.com/zz/entertainmentlife/20190801/back-to-school-teachers-advice-on-what-to-do-before-school-year-begins)

**Realize that kids are different at school than at home.** Sometimes kids will have stomachaches and headaches at school and be fine at home, or the opposite can be true. It depends on how your child is wired. Recognize that the symptoms the nurse sees might not be the same symptoms you see regularly.

**Understand that the nurse might not need to call you**. Most districts have protocols for calling parents if there is a fever or head injury. If there’s an injury that seems to be fixed with a bandage or if the kid just needs a break, the nurse might not call you. Sometimes nurses who know families well have more information about whether you’re the kind of parent who wants a call at every visit to the nurse’s office. If you are that parent, let the nurse know you’d like a call. Realize that the nurse’s time is valuable (usually there’s only one of her for hundreds or even thousands of children). She might not be able to call you that moment. A good reason you might want a call is if you’re trying to establish a pattern to your child’s symptoms or if you’re trying out a new medication and need to know if it’s working.

**When in doubt, overshare information.** Often the school nurse is the last to know but the first to see your child in an emergency.