



COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICE

Introduction

School is defined as an educational institution where groups of students pursue their studies at defined levels, receive instructions from one or better qualified teachers. Whereas school health refers to a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity among the students, teachers and other school personnel. On the other hand, school health services ideally refer to the need based comprehensive services rendered to the students; teachers and other personnel involved in the school to promote and protect their health, prevent and control diseases and maintain their health. Therefore, practically it refers mainly to provide the basic necessary services to the students to promote and protect their health, control diseases and maintain their health. Thus, the ultimate aim of school health services is to promote, protect and maintain health of school children and reduce morbidity and mortality in team.

COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL

Common health problems at school levels are

1. Malnutrition
2. Infectious diseases
3. Intestinal parasites
4. Diseases of skin, eye and ear
5. Dental caries

Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a state of nutrition in which a deficiency or excess (or imbalance) of energy, protein and other nutrients causes measurable adverse effects on tissue or body form (body shape, size and composition) and function and clinical outcome. Malnutrition can often be very difficult to recognise, particularly in patients who are overweight or obese to start with. Malnutrition can happen very gradually, which can make it very difficult to spot in the early stages. Some of the symptoms and signs to watch out for include loss of appetite, weight loss, tiredness, reduced ability to perform normal tasks, reduced physical performance, altered mood, poor concentration and poor growth in children.

Malnutrition in children also understood as under nutrition is common globally and results in both short and long term irreversible negative health outcomes including stunted growth which may also be linked to cognitive development deficits, underweight and wasting. Lack of access to highly nutritious foods, especially in the present context of rising food prices, is a common cause of malnutrition. Poor feeding practices, such as inadequate breastfeeding, offering the wrong foods, and not ensuring that the child gets enough nutritious food, contribute to malnutrition.

Infectious diseases

Infectious diseases also called communicable diseases include any disease or illness caused by pathogenic microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites. Many organisms live in and on our bodies. They are normally harmless or even helpful, but under certain conditions, some organisms may cause disease. One can get infected by touching, eating, drinking or breathing something that contains a germ. Some infectious diseases can be passed from person to person. Some are transmitted by bites from insects or animals and others are acquired by ingesting contaminated food or water or being exposed to organisms in the environment.

Children are often at an increased risk for infectious diseases while their immune systems are still developing and simply because of exposure. Most children will have at least 6 to 8 respiratory or breathing tract infections each year. These include colds, ear infections, sinus infections, bronchitis, and pneumonia. Infections of the bowels are also common. When children gather together in child care settings and school, there is the opportunity for infections to spread from one child to another.

Intestinal parasites

Intestinal parasites are parasites that can infect the gastro-intestinal tract of humans. They can live throughout the body, but most prefer the intestinal wall. Means of exposure include ingestion of undercooked meat, drinking infected water and skin absorption. Intestinal parasites spread in areas with poor sanitation and are most common in tropical developing countries on the African, Asian, and South American continents.

Parasites are very common around the world. The infections are transmitted in crowded places like day cares. Also, children in developing countries are usually carrying some type of parasite. Poor sanitation and unsafe water increase the risk of catching parasites. The most common intestinal parasites in children include giardiasis and pinworm. Other parasites are common in children living in developing countries where sanitation and hygiene are poor. These include ascariasis, amebiasis, and tapeworm.

Diseases of skin, eye and ear

Skin, eye and ear disorders are extremely common among children. Diseases of the skin that lines the auditory canal can sometimes cause a kind of local swelling that blocks the canal and interferes with hearing. A child with an ear problem may have an ear infection which can cause ear pain and fever. If an ear infection is not treated on time, the ear drum may perforate and the child feels less pain.

Dental caries

Dental caries is an infectious, communicable disease, which causes destruction of teeth by acid-forming bacteria found in dental plaque. The most important concept to remember is that caries is a dynamic disease process, and not a static problem. Secondly, before a cavity is formed in the tooth, the caries infection can actually be reversed.

Dental caries (tooth decay) is a major oral health problem in schoolchildren. Dental caries in children is typically first observed clinically as a white spot lesion. The early manifestation of the caries process is a small patch of demineralised (softened) enamel at the tooth surface, often hidden from sight in the fissures (grooves) of teeth or in between the teeth. The destruction spreads into the softer, sensitive part of the tooth beneath the enamel (dentine). The weakened enamel then collapses to form a cavity and the tooth is progressively destroyed. If the tooth surface remains intact and non-cavitated, then remineralization of the enamel is possible. If the subsurface demineralization of enamel is extensive, it eventually causes the collapse of the overlying tooth surface, resulting in a cavity.

COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

Components of school health services comprises the following categories:

I. Health promotion and protective services

It will consist of:

1. Wholesome school environment
2. Maintenance of personal hygiene
3. Nutritional services
4. Physical and recreational activities
5. Promotion of mental health
6. Immunization

II. Therapeutic services

1. Health appraisal
Health appraisal consists of periodic medical examinations and observations of the children by the class teacher and the medical officer.
2. Treatment and follow up
3. First aid and emergency care
4. Specialized health services

III. Rehabilitative services (i.e. Care of the handicapped)

IV. School health records

SCHOOL HEALTH TEAM

In order to run school and implement the school health services effectively, the school health team should consist of the following persons.

1. The school principal
2. The school teacher
3. The parents
4. The community
5. The children
6. The medical officer
7. The school health nurse or community health nurse

OBJECTIVES OF SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

The main objectives of school health services are as follows:

1. To promote positive health among the school children
2. Early detection, treatment and follow up measures of defects with various health problems of school children
3. To maintain a comprehensive health record system
4. To assess the health status of students
5. To develop healthy attitudes and behaviours of students
6. To awaken health consciousness in children
7. To ensure a healthy environment for children at school
8. To plan and implement a program of prevention and control of communicable disease in accordance with regulations
9. To provide health counselling and instruction for students, parents, teachers and staff.
10. To provide health education for school personnel and parents
11. To develop and implement an emergency care plan

ACTIVITIES OF THE SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES

Activities of the school health services are as follows:

1. Prevention and investigation of Communicable Diseases

- i. Health education of the school personnel in order to be able to take the necessary measures to prevent viral meningitis.
- ii. In case of an outbreak of a communicable disease the Health Visitors apply the necessary measures in order to prevent spreading of the disease.
- iii. The Health Visitor co-operates with other health professionals for the investigation of certain communicable diseases such as viral meningitis and tuberculosis.

2. Vaccinations

The Health Visitors give to students the routine vaccinations according to the existing vaccination program of the Ministry of Health. The students as well as the parents are informed about a certain vaccine that will be given. In order to vaccinate a student at school it is necessary that the Health Visitor takes the parents or guardians a written consent.

3. Health Education

Health education is provided by both Health Visitors and School Doctors. The main purpose of health education is to give students the knowledge but also the skills to develop and adapt a healthy behaviour. According to the international literature health education programs which involve active participation of students in education, are more effective than lectures. Based on that, two educational programmed courses for students of the Secondary school, have been applied since several years now.

4. Educational programmed courses

For quite a few years now the Health Visitors have been applied two educational health programmed courses for the secondary school students. One is the educational anti smoking programmed course for the students attending the first years of Secondary School and the educational programmed course for the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the sexually transmitted diseases for the students attending the last three years of Secondary School. The main characteristics of these programmed courses are the training of some key students who in turn take over the training of their fellow students.

5. Anti- Smoking Educational Program

The particularity of this program is based on the fact that the Health Visitor trains two students from each group. When the training is completed the two students undertake to present the lessons, in the presence of the Health Visitor, to their fellow students.

The aim of the program is:

- i. To offer some knowledge on the consequences of smoking on human health and generally to the human life (financial consequences, as well as social and environmental consequences).
- ii. Through games and the acting roles, the children develop a healthy attitude and behaviour. At the same time they acquire those abilities, which are necessary for a young person of their age to resist the challenge to smoke.

6. Anti HIV/AIDS educational Programme for students

An anti-AIDS educational programme can be applied to the students from time to time.

The scope of this programme which is carried out by means of dialogue, games and through acting roles is:

- i. To offer the students some knowledge on AIDS and the sexually transmitted diseases so that:
 - ❖ They would be aware of the methods of contamination and protection and
 - ❖ They would learn about the methods by which the virus is not transmitted so that they do not have false phobias about HIV people who are HIV positive.

- ii. The development of a healthy attitude, behaviour and the acquisition of ways of resistance through various exercises, which are carried out.
- iii. To increase the children's sensitivity to the consequences of AIDS.

7. Organizing Healthy Breakfasts

The Health Visitors in collaboration with the school management teams and the Parents Associations organize the serving of healthy breakfast in Primary Schools. An educational course regarding nutrition in general and the importance of breakfast in particular, always precede the actual serving of the meal.

CONCLUSION

School health services provide the basic necessary services to the students to promote and protect their health, control diseases and maintain their health. The main aim of school health services is thus to promote, protect and maintain health of school children and reduce morbidity and mortality in team. The common health problems at school levels are malnutrition; infectious diseases; intestinal parasites; diseases of skin, eye, ear and dental caries. School health services are taken up through various activities such as prevention and investigation of communicable diseases; vaccination; health education and various other educational programmed courses.