

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PREVENTION FACT SHEET

Prevention for Schools and School Districts

School preparedness is strengthened by prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities (also known as the five preparedness mission areas—see the text box to the right).¹ This fact sheet describes what prevention is, how prevention is connected to the other preparedness missions, what prevention efforts planning teams may want to consider, and how prevention activities can be integrated into planning efforts; additional resources are provided, as well.²

In many instances, schools (public or nonpublic) have the ability to prevent or stop an emergency from occurring in the first place. Prevention helps to ensure the safety of the school community and maintain the learning environment. Efforts to prevent emergencies may include a range of behaviors—not only significant, targeted actions intended to stop major events, but also broader, everyday activities that can help prevent events small and large and build a safe and healthy school environment. For example, custodial teams clean and maintain school buildings on a daily basis; this activity not only helps to prevent the spread of common colds and other minor afflictions, but it also helps to prevent the spread of more major infectious diseases, such as seasonal flu, or even serious outbreaks, such as H1N1. Also, the everyday procedures to keep a school clean can be easily ramped up to address a more serious outbreak—something much more challenging to accomplish when no existing procedures are in place at all. For example, if a school is warned about an emerging infectious disease, custodians can help prevent the school community from becoming ill by using disease-specific disinfectants and sanitizers recommended by the local public health department. When

MISSION AREA DEFINITIONS

- **Prevention** is the action schools and school districts take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- **Protection** is the ongoing actions schools and school districts take to safeguard the school, students, and staff from an emergency event.
- **Mitigation** focuses on actions schools and school districts take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life, injuries, and property damage from an emergency event.
- **Response** is putting the school's and school district's plans into place to effectively respond to an emergency event, and provide for the immediate needs of students and staff.
- **Recovery** is teaming with community partners to restore educational programming; the physical environment; business operations; and social, emotional, and behavioral health.

¹ *School* refers to all types, including private and public, and all grade levels for the purposes of this fact sheet.

² Fact sheets on the other four areas of *protection, mitigation, response, and recovery* can be found on the REMS TA Center's Website at <https://rem.ed.gov>.

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PREVENTION FACT SHEET

it comes to preventing other emergencies from occurring, it's simply a matter of expanding current programming or efforts.

While we may be able to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, some emergencies cannot be prevented. In these instances, schools and school districts can conduct activities that fall under the other four mission areas to lessen the effects of an emergency. For example, while we can't *prevent* an earthquake from happening, we can teach the whole school community about effective personal *response* actions should one occur (i.e., Drop, Cover, and Hold On) to help prevent injury. Schools and school districts can also help ensure that the situation doesn't get worse by preventing secondary or cascading events that are caused by the initial incident. Using the same example of earthquakes, schools and school districts should ensure that they have effective family reunification systems in place. These systems would ensure that children aren't lost or sent home with the wrong guardian (a secondary or cascading event) after an earthquake (an initial incident) forces a school to evacuate to another location.

Prevention as a Component of Preparedness

The five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery are all connected and directly contribute to preparedness. **Prevention** and **protection** activities can



occur simultaneously, as with all the mission areas. While **prevention** efforts aim to stop an event (or secondary/cascading event) from occurring, **protection** is ongoing and may include components of **prevention** (such as teaching students about proper handwashing techniques). And while a school or school district may not be able to **prevent** an event from occurring,

mitigation efforts can reduce its impact. When an incident does occur and the school implements a **response**, **prevention** activities may still be needed. For example, if the school or school district is responding to an infectious disease outbreak, additional **prevention** activities may need to be conducted to stop the spread of the disease, such as the exclusion of students who are ill. Finally, when **recovery** activities are being conducted, the school can identify what new **prevention** activities could be initiated in the future.

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PREVENTION FACT SHEET

Examples of Prevention Activities

The topic of emergency preparedness is very broad and includes numerous activities. One way to categorize these activities is into domains of safety, security, and emergency management. As it relates to prevention activities, planning teams may want to consider the following—in collaboration with their community partners—as they develop goals, objectives, and courses of action in their emergency operations plan (EOP):

Safety

- Integrate and regularly test fire protection systems, including sprinklers, alarms, and pull stations.
- Educate students how to stay safe and healthy at school, home, and other places they frequent. Education can include instruction such as what are proper handwashing techniques and how to stay safe online.
- Educate teachers, staff, administrators, and students and their families about expected behavior between instructional/noninstructional staff and students, including what is appropriate and inappropriate touching.
- Require students be free from contagious or infectious diseases, detailed in an exclusion list, when in attendance.
- Monitor and maintain the school plant to ensure a suitable physical learning environment.
- Ensure that the school buildings and site are cleaned properly to prevent hazards, such as rodents, and the spread of disease.

Security

- Ensure that all information technology systems are protected by firewalls and other appropriate security measures.
- Provide security, by activities such as applying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to school grounds and structures. For example, these actions can include monitoring access/egress to the school and ensuring that visitors wear passes.

Emergency Management

- Establish communication channels with groups and individuals who play a role in school preparedness, including law enforcement who can provide notice of crimes occurring in the area that may require the school to take response actions such as a lockdown.
- Establish effective reunification procedures that are integrated with local reunification plans for after an emergency.
- Ensure that students with disabilities and access and functional needs are assigned at least one person who can assist them in an emergency.

- Apply preventive measures for places where students are off school premises, such as on the bus, on trips, and at sporting events. For example, is there a preventive maintenance schedule for the school buses?

Integrating Prevention Efforts Into Emergency Planning

As prevention is one of the five mission areas that make up preparedness, the school's and school district's planning teams should keep in mind what prevention activities need to be conducted at their school or school district. Together with protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts, prevention can help ensure that the school or school district has comprehensive procedures, policies, and plans in place to address possible threats and hazards.

An awareness of what are considered prevention activities may be especially useful as planning teams create, review, or revise their EOP. To achieve this, the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (School Guide)*; <http://rems.ed.gov/K12GuideForDevelHQSchool.aspx> recommends a six-step planning process that is flexible, adaptable, and customizable to the building level. Again, using the example of preventing the spread of infectious diseases, the planning process could be used as follows:

Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team. The planning team will likely comprise a core planning team, school personnel, community partners, and a school district representative. The team and infectious disease planning efforts would be bolstered through the input from educators and staff, including a school nurse and counselor; experts and stakeholders representing state and local public health, emergency medical services, environmental health and safety, and local health care; the custodial team; and the food services team.

Step 2: Understand the situation. Here, the planning team identifies threats and hazards to the school and surrounding community using a variety of assessment tools, assesses those risks, and prioritizes them for inclusion in the EOP. One tool that may be especially useful to prevent the spread of infectious diseases is a Capacity Assessment that examines the capabilities of students and staff as well as the services and material resources of community partners. In this instance, the planning team can work with the local public health department and other community partners to identify what specialized cleaning resources are needed.

As part of ongoing efforts, the school or school district could also work with its public health partners to develop and maintain information-sharing systems for day-to-day reporting as well as disease surveillance efforts in the event of an outbreak or epidemic.

Step 3: Determine goals and objectives and Step 4: Plan development (identify courses of action). After assessing the level of risk posed by threats and hazards, the planning team would

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PREVENTION FACT SHEET

work to determine goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an incident. After the goals and objectives are identified, the team would develop courses of action that describe the who, what, when, and how to meet those objectives.

- A possible prevention-focused *before goal* for addressing infectious diseases could be the following: Prevent infectious disease outbreaks.
- One possible *objective* to meet that goal could be the following: Provide custodians training on how to clean to stop the spread of infectious diseases.
- Some *courses of action* could be determining who is responsible for ensuring that custodians are trained, what resources are needed to perform the cleaning, and how often cleaning takes place.

Step 5: Plan preparation, review, and approval. Now the planning team creates a draft of the EOP. Preventive efforts can be included in appropriate annexes, especially before goals, objectives, and courses of action. For example, cleaning procedures would likely be included in an Infectious Diseases Annex.

The school's and school district's prevention activities and plans should also be coordinated and integrated with those of the local municipality, which in turn will be integrated with those at the state and Federal levels as described in the National Prevention Framework (see the Key Resources section below for more information). Integration helps provide more comprehensive prevention efforts with the support of local government departments. The local emergency management office can help schools with this coordination.

The draft EOP is then circulated to those responsible for implementing the plan for their review, edits are made based on those comments, and approval is sought from the school's or school district's appropriate leadership.

Step 6: Plan implementation and maintenance. Here, the plan is maintained via regular reviews and revised when needed. Further, individuals with roles outlined in the annex are trained in their responsibilities and tested through exercises.

Key Resources

Resources available to support prevention planning efforts include:

- **Using the Five Preparedness Missions to Help Ready Your District and School for Emergencies Webinar, REMS TA Center.** In this Webinar, presenters discussed how schools and school districts can take a more comprehensive approach to emergency preparedness by addressing the five mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery. Using examples from frequently asked questions about topics including threat assessments, earthquake preparedness, and adult sexual misconduct, the presenters

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

PREVENTION FACT SHEET

discussed strategies to build capacity in critical functions and highlighted key courses of action.

<http://rem.ed.gov/PreparednessMissionsForSchoolEmerg.aspx>

- **National Prevention Framework, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.** The National Prevention Framework is one of the five National Planning Frameworks and provides guidance to individuals, communities, the private and nonprofit sectors, faith-based organizations, and all levels of organizations to prevent, avoid, or stop a potential or actual terrorist incident.
https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1466017209279-83b72d5959787995794c0874095500b1/National_Prevention_Framework2nd.pdf
- **How Positive School Climate Can Enhance School Safety Webinar, REMS TA Center.** In this archived Webinar, presenters provide an overview on how a positive school climate can help schools and communities prevent emergencies and enhance school safety. In addition, they provide information on effective strategies for creating positive conditions for learning to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students.
<http://rem.ed.gov/EnhanceSchoolSafety.aspx>
- **Incorporating Sextortion Prevention, Response, and Recovery into School Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) Webinar, REMS TA Center.** Statistics and background information on sextortion, and how students can be both victims and perpetrators, are discussed in this Webinar. The presenters also share how education agencies can develop measures to prevent and protect students from sextortion with support from local and Federal agencies.
<http://rem.ed.gov/Sextortion2016Webinar.aspx>
- **School Behavioral Threat Assessments: An Introduction Training by Request, REMS TA Center.** This training introduces participants to various components of school behavioral threat assessments, which were originally put forth by the Safe School Initiative, alongside new information and guidance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation as presented in the *School Guide*. Participants learn about effective characteristics of threat assessments for consideration when forming their own approach and team. Specialized topics are also addressed, such as the use of social media in threat assessments. Participants have the opportunity to discuss concepts in small-group discussions and practice a basic threat assessment in a tabletop exercise.
http://rem.ed.gov/TA_TrainingsByRequest.aspx