

Q & A for Employees

Please take a few minutes to read the information below about Thomas County School System's School-Based Health Center and the Questions and Answers (Q and A) that follow.

Last Friday, Primary Care of Southwest Georgia, Inc. opened a School-Based Health Center on the campus of Thomas County Middle School. **The center is open to serve all Thomas County students and employees.**

The health center will be open each school day 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Appointments may be scheduled by calling [229-227-2936](tel:229-227-2936). However, appointments are not required to be seen.

The center is staffed by a board certified nurse practitioner, Rachael Clark Lackey, who is a Thomas County Central High School graduate. (Please see the attached flyer about Rachael and her credentials.) Rachael and her supervising physician at Primary Care of Southwest Georgia, Inc. can diagnose, treat, prescribe, and if needed administer medication for most common illnesses.

The health center has a laboratory where flu and strep tests can be administered. The goal of the clinic is to provide swift and efficient treatment to students and staff in order to allow them to get well quickly so that they may return to school or work.

Staff members who utilize the health center during the school day may go to the center during their planning period without having their leave time charged. Principals will work with staff members to arrange coverage for their classes if a health center visit extends beyond the teacher's planning period. Staff members will also be granted leave to accompany their children who are Thomas County students to the center. Employees will go to the front of the line in the center, will be seen promptly, and will be able to quickly return to work.

The school-based health center is specifically prepared to provide the following services:

- Treatment for illness (Strep Throat, ear infections, pink eye, influenza, ringworms) or injuries (scrapes, strains and cuts).
- Flu tests.
- Treatment for asthma attacks, etc.
- Treatment for chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma.
- Well Child Checks (including immunizations, hearing and vision screenings).
- Routine school and sports physicals.
- Counseling in regards to nutrition and mental health.
- Lab tests and other health-related issues.

Once parents grant permission for their child(ren) to be seen in the school-based health center, the school system will provide transportation for students from all of our schools to the center.

Exactly where is the health center located?

The center is located at Thomas County Middle School and has its own entrance from the outside so that those going there do not have to go through the school to enter. If you are familiar with the middle school, the entrance is near the entrance to the band room. As you face the middle school, the health center is on the left side of the campus with an entrance facing the left teacher parking lot. You will see a Primary Care of Southwest Georgia, Inc. sign next to the entrance.

If my children use the health center for a sick visit will they lose their pediatrician or will adults lose their general practitioner?

No! Unfortunately, some inaccurate information was disseminated last week which led some to believe that a student who receives care in the school-based health center could not later be seen by his or her regular doctor. That is **NOT** true. If a student has an established pediatrician or an adult has an established primary care doctor, I encourage you to continue to use your existing doctor for your annual well check-up and for your routine care. However, an occasional visit to the school-based health center to be treated for an illness or minor injury will NOT cause you to be dropped by your primary doctor. Being seen at the school-based health center is no different than seeing the doctor at a walk-in clinic such as Doctor's Care, Urgent Care, the Emergency Room, or taking advantage of the State Health Telemedicine option that is available to employees with state health benefits.

I met last week with doctors from The Pediatric Center in Thomasville who confirmed that they will not drop patients who are seen in the school-based health center for an occasional sick visit so long as the parent does not change the student's "medical home." The school-based health center will not solicit patients for well visits who already have an established health care provider.

To be clear, well visits are available in the health center for students who do not already have a medical home, but patients with an established doctor are encouraged to continue using their regular doctor for well visits and for the majority of their care.

If you have a primary care doctor and visit the school-based health center, you will reveal that you have a primary doctor when you are seen at the school-based health center. The health center provider will electronically transmit your treatment record to your primary doctor to ensure continuity of care should you need a follow-up visit with your primary care doctor. If you or your child has a recurring problem such as multiple ear infections or multiple cases of strep within a short period of time, and if you have an established doctor, you should make an appointment to see him or her.

If you do not have a primary care doctor, the school-based health center can become your medical home. The main office for Primary Care of Southwest Georgia is located at 454 Smith Avenue, and as a patient of the school-based health center, you will have year-round, 24 hour access to care through Primary Care of Southwest Georgia's network of providers and doctors.

The purpose of the school-based health center is NOT to take patients from their primary care providers. Since most insurance plans will provide coverage for one "well visit" per year, it is logical that if a patient receives a "well visit" in one location, he or she will not have

coverage for a second “well-visit” elsewhere during the same year. For that reason, those who have an established provider will want to schedule their “well visit” with their primary care provider.

How do local doctors feel about the school-based health center?

While thousands of school-based health centers exist around the country including several hundred in Georgia, the concept is new locally; consequently, a few local doctors have concerns about how the school-based health center will impact their practices and the continuity of care for their patients. However, **the vast majority of doctors endorse the concept of school-based health centers** as is evident in a policy statement issued by the *American Academy of Pediatrics*. A copy of the full policy statement is attached to this email for your reference, but the first statement summarizes the essence of the opinion: “School-based health centers (SBHCs) have become an important method of health care delivery for the youth of our nation.” (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/129/2/387.full.pdf>)

If I have a workers’ comp claim, may I be seen at the school-based health center?

Yes! The school-based health center has been added to the workers’ compensation panel of approved providers. We encourage everyone with a minor work-related injury to first see the school nurse for an evaluation. If you need further treatment, you may select any provider from the panel, including the school-based health center. Remember, if you are seen in the school-based health center, your leave time will not be charged for the time spent in the health center.

Will the school-based health center offer family planning services or birth control?

No. If a student asks about family planning, he or she will be referred to the health department or Primary Care of Southwest Georgia’s primary location on Smith Avenue. The agreement between Primary Care of Southwest Georgia and the Thomas County Board of Education states explicitly that family planning services will not be offered on school property.

Why did Thomas County decide to implement a school-based health clinic?

School-based health centers or clinics (SBHCs) are another way school districts are addressing student health by providing an additional supportive, wraparound service to students. SBHCs have existed in Georgia for more than two decades. Studies have shown that school-based health centers decrease absences, tardiness, and school discipline or behavior problems. When students receive care at school for their health care needs, daily attendance increases.

A greater percentage of children in Thomas County are uninsured as compared to the national average. About one in four Georgia counties is home to an SBHC, and there are efforts in place to expand their reach. PARTNERS for Equity in Child and Adolescent Health is a grant-making organization based at Emory University that since 2010 has helped provide start-up funds to schools for SBHCs.

If you would like to be seen in the school-based health center, you may schedule an appointment by calling [229-227-2936](tel:229-227-2936).

To save time on your first visit, you may download and complete the attached registration packet prior to your visit. I have attached an adult registration packet for you and a pediatric packet if needed for your child(ren). The packets, along with information about the school-based health center, can also be found on our system's website at <http://www.thomas.k12.ga.us/content/school-based-health-center>.