

Dear Parents and Guardians of Thomas County Students:

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**. 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.

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

- Treatment for illness (Strep Throat, ear infections, pink eye, influenza, ring-worms) 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.

May I go with my child to be seen at the school-based health center?

Yes! We welcome and encourage parents to accompany their child to the health center whether the child is being seen there for a sick visit or a well visit. If you grant permission for your child to be seen in the health center and if transportation or your schedule prevents you from being able to accompany your child to the center, a designated school employee will accompany your child to the center when you schedule an appointment or grant permission by phone for your child to be seen in the health center. You will be called before your child is taken to the clinic, and you will be called after the visit for a report on the visit. If your child is deemed to be contagious, you will be called to pick up your child from the health center. If you are not able to accompany your child to the health center, you will always be called before any treatment is provided.

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

No! If a student has an established pediatrician, 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."

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

If your child does not have a primary care doctor, the school-based health center can become his or her 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, your child 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>)

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 for your child to be seen in the school-based health center, you may schedule an appointment by calling **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 a pediatric registration packet. The packet, 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>.