Every Day Counts: School Absenteeism and the Link to Health

H3011: Council on School Health Program
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Faculty Disclosure Information

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Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the presentation, participants should be able to:

1. Define chronic absenteeism, whom it most impacts, and its relationship to long-term academic success and health
2. Discuss major causes of absenteeism including health-related factors and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Describe how multi-tiered interventions can prevent and address chronic absence
References

For more information on this subject, see the following resources:

For clinicians:
• AAP Policy Statement on School Absenteeism
• Learning Burst on AAP website

For families:
• www.attendanceworks.org
• www.healthychildren.org
Chronic Absenteeism:

What is it? Why do we care?
Definitions

**TRUANCY**

Counts **unexcused** absences

Rooted in compliance with attendance law, and can result in legal action

**CHRONIC ABSENCE**

Counts **all** absences:

- Excused, unexcused and suspensions

- Emphasizes impact of missed school, regardless of cause

*Missing 10% = About 2 days/month or almost a full month of school*
Who Is Impacted? 1 in 4 children

Data for school year 2021-22 in the United States suggests:

• Approximately 1 in 4 students were chronically absent (missed 10%+ of school days).

Chronic absence has increased significantly since pre-pandemic levels.

• In many states, rates have doubled since pre-COVID.

Disparities in Chronic Absenteeism

• Certain populations of students are much more likely to experience chronic absenteeism:
  • Economically disadvantaged
  • Black
  • Latino/x
  • Pacific Islander
  • Native American
  • Students with disabilities
  • Students experiencing homelessness

• More common in early elementary and high school years
Why Chronic Absenteeism?

• Chronic absenteeism in early grades can lead to below grade-level reading in 3rd grade, which in turn impacts high school graduation rates

• By high school, irregular attendance is a better predictor of school dropout than test scores

• Not earning a high school diploma is associated with increased mortality risk or lower life expectancy
School attendance is a high priority for schools.

Attendance has implications for not only **academic performance and school climate** for students, but also **funding**.

**Every Student Succeeds Act**, passed in 2015:
- 36 states and DC chose chronic absenteeism for their state accountability system

Link Between Health and Education

- Health
- Education
- Social Factors
Common causes of school absence include health and social factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Aversion</th>
<th>Disengagements</th>
<th>Misconceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Chronic and acute illness</td>
<td>• Struggling academically and/or behaviorally</td>
<td>• Lack of challenging, culturally responsive instruction</td>
<td>• Absences are only a problem if they are unexcused</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Family responsibilities or home situation</td>
<td>• Unwelcoming school climate</td>
<td>• Bored</td>
<td>• Missing 2 days per month doesn’t affect learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trauma</td>
<td>• Social and peer challenges</td>
<td>• No meaningful relationships to adults in the school (especially given staff shortages)</td>
<td>• Lose track and underestimate TOTAL absences</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Poor transportation</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
<td>• Lack of enrichment opportunities</td>
<td>• Assume students must stay home for any symptom of illness</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Housing and food insecurity</td>
<td>• Biased disciplinary and suspension practices</td>
<td>• Lack of academic and behavioral support</td>
<td>• Attendance only matters in the older grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inequitable access to needed services (including health)</td>
<td>• Undiagnosed disability and/or lack of disability accommodations</td>
<td>• Failure to earn credits</td>
<td>• Suspensions don’t count as absence</td>
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<td>• System involvement</td>
<td>• Caregivers had negative educational experiences</td>
<td>• Need to work conflicts with being in high school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of predictable schedules for learning</td>
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<td>• Lack of access to technology</td>
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<td>• Community violence</td>
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</tbody>
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Health Barriers to Attendance and Learning

- Common illnesses and injuries
- Asthma
- Behavioral health issues
- Obesity
- Teen pregnancy

- Vision problems
- Oral health
- Family health concerns

Health Barriers to Learning and Attendance

• **Asthma**: Asthma is the leading health-related cause of school absence; children with asthma are three times as likely as their peers to have 10 or more absences per year.

• **Dental health**: Children between 5 and 17 years miss nearly two million school days in a single year nationwide due to dental health-related problems.
3 years since the pandemic wrecked attendance, kids still aren't showing up to school

A sharp rise in school absences
Students who missed at least 10 percent of school days in the 10 most populous states

- California: 30% in 2021-22
- Texas: 26% in 2021-22
- Florida: 32% in 2021-22
- New York: 33% in 2021-22
- Pennsylvania: 30% in 2021-22
- Illinois: 30% in 2021-22
- Ohio: 30% in 2021-22
- Georgia: 31% in 2021-22
- North Carolina: 39% in 2021-22
- Michigan: 39% in 2021-22

By The New York Times
“The biggest reason for the rise [in chronic absenteeism] seems to be simply that students have fallen out of the habit of going to school every day.”
Impact of COVID-19

National test scores plunge, with still no sign of pandemic recovery

By Donna St. George

June 21, 2023 at 12:05 a.m. EDT

“National test scores plummeted for 13-year-olds, according to new data that shows the single largest drop in math in 50 years and no signs of academic recovery following the disruptions of the pandemic.”
Chronic Absenteeism:

What can be done? What is a clinician’s role?
Multi-Tiered Approach

**Tier 1**
- Engaging school climate
- Positive relationships with students and families
- Impact of absences on achievement widely understood
- Chronic absence data monitored
- Good and improved attendance recognized
- Common barriers identified and addressed

**Tier 2**
- Personalized early outreach
- Action plan addresses barriers and increases engagement
- Caring mentors

**Tier 3**
- Coordinated school and interagency response
- Legal intervention (last resort)

*Students missing 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)*

*Students missing 10-19% (moderate chronic absence)*

*Students missing 5-9% (at risk)*

*Students missing less than 5% (satisfactory)*

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Tiered Health Interventions

**TIER 1**
- Universal
- Provide access to school-wide health screenings
- Ensure a clean, healthy and safe school environment
- Educate families to prevent unnecessary health-related absences
- Monitor school health and attendance data

**TIER 2**
- Provide referrals to health care providers
- Include school nurse on student planning
- Develop school plans for students with chronic illness such as asthma

**TIER 3**
- Intensive case management with coordination of health providers and other school support

- Students who missed 20% or more of school (severe chronic absence)
- Students with chronic absence (missing 10%) or 2-3 days per month

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In February 2019, AAP released a landmark policy statement regarding the role of pediatric providers in addressing school attendance.
Chronic absenteeism as a vital sign
Take Home Points

1. Supporting student attendance has long-term benefits for academic success and health.

2. Certain populations of students, including children of color, of lower socioeconomic status, and with disabilities, are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism.

3. Health and social barriers are leading causes of school absenteeism.

4. Pediatricians are well positioned to help prevent and address these barriers, and to partner with schools to monitor absenteeism and take collective action to improve attendance.
Let’s continue the discussion!

Questions? Ideas? Stay in touch!

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