

Infection prevention training for school settings initiative



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The Nebraska Infection Control Assessment and Promotion Program worked to build capacity for infection prevention and control in elementary and secondary schools, childcare facilities, and institutions of higher education. This led to training for school nurses and health paraeducators, a statewide Infection Prevention in School Settings Conference, and expanded resources.

The “What”

The Nebraska Infection Control Assessment and Promotion Program (ICAP) is supported by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Healthcare-associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI/AR) Program via Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) funding. ICAP, which is a collaborative effort of University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), Nebraska Medicine (teaching hospital for UNMC) and Nebraska DHHS, has rapidly expanded since its start in 2015. It represents an academic/public partnership to combine resources and expertise to meet the needs of healthcare facilities and communities in Nebraska.



In 2021, ICAP aimed to build capacity for infection prevention and control in elementary and secondary schools, childcare facilities, and institutions of higher education. They started with a goal to help schools by performing infection prevention and control (IPC) assessments of school environments. Proposed assessments included policies that covered absenteeism, disease reporting and surveillance, blood and body fluid exposures, and environment factors that contribute to spread of disease (i.e., hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfection processes, indoor air quality). COVID-19 created a difficult environment and unique challenges for school administrators and nurses. This resulted in some barriers for ICAP team to work with facilities initially. However, constant networking with school nurses allowed ICAP to eventually shadow, discuss, and identify gaps in infection prevention and control in some of the schools in different parts of the state.

A poll completed at the Nebraska School Nurses Association conference along with a learning needs assessment conducted prior to education through our school nurse contact list, identified educational needs and preferred methods of providing education. Based on these results, a team was created to plan training for school personnel who oversee infection prevention and control in schools. This included school health professionals, policymakers, and DHHS staff. The main education target was school nurses and health paraeducators. Project Firstline (PFL) was utilized to provide education to schools in March of 2023. The online series was offered twice a week. Eventually, this led to the development of an ICAP led, DHHS and Nebraska Infection Control Network (NICN) [<http://www.nicn.org/>] supported, Statewide educational project – the first Infection Prevention in School Settings Conference.



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The one-day conference featured 7 IPC subjects covered by experts. It was attended by 121 people, representing 18 out of the 19 LHDs and 60 schools across Nebraska.

A one-day conference was planned with 7 IPC subjects covered by experts. Curriculum was developed by NICN with the help of various partners and stakeholders in the state. Educational Service Units provided satellite locations and IT services to provide the conference throughout Nebraska. Local Health departments (LHDs) were engaged and participated in the training at satellite locations in their district to be better prepared for providing support to their schools. Nursing educational credits were provided at a low cost as an incentive to engage nurses to participate.

The “So What”

The conference took place on April 28, 2023, less than 2 years after the initial expansion proposal. Speakers from DHHS, the University of Nebraska Medical Center, ICAP, NICN, and LHDs were involved. Both in-person and telehealth attendance were substantial. The program

reviews were positive, and the audience requested that the program be recorded and made available for further reference. Eighteen (18) out of the 19 Nebraska LHDs and 60 schools were represented in the 121 attendees of the conference. Three (3) of the schools were early childcare facilities and 2 were private schools. The rest of the schools were public schools. ICAP developed, NE DHHS approved, posters of the “Contagious Disease Table” were given out at the conference to serve as reference, and the entire stock was rapidly exhausted. One hundred forty-two (142) more posters were requested by LHDs wanting to distribute to the schools in their districts.

ICAP developed a school website (<https://icap.nebraskamed.com/facilities/school/>) to provide resources specific to schools around IPC. Tools for school nurses were developed from feedback from networking with schools. These included a chart that was developed from the NE DHHS Communicable Diseases Handbook, a Blood and Body Fluid Training template, and Medical Waste Disposal in Schools.

Participation in the March 2023 PFL training that also included pre- and post-assessments was lower than the School Training Conference. However, nurses participating in this course did provide feedback on gaps in knowledge around disposal of infectious waste, which led to the creation of an educational document on how to dispose of medical waste in Nebraska.

The “Now What”

ICAP has had several requests from conference participants to help with policy development and training of school staff, as well as making the infection prevention training in schools a more permanent project. Training of cleaning staff was requested for a large school system and development of the training is in process. Feedback from attendees confirmed the need for the training and requested more training options be given for school staff that could not attend the initial meeting. The conference presentations were recorded, and ‘enduring’ education is in the process of development.

Key contributors to this project include Daniel Brailita, MD; Nicolas Cortes-Penfield, MD; Margaret Deacy; Candi Kennedy MSN, RNC-OB, C-EFM; Josette McConville BSN, RN, CIC; Jody Scebold, RN, MSN, EdD, CIC; Sarah Stream MPH, CDIPC,FADAA; Kate Tyner BSN, RN,CIC, Nebraska ICAP; and M. Salman Ashraf, MBBS, Nebraska DHHS.