

Vermont Public Health Association

Policy Statement

School Lockdown Drills

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Description: Currently, forty states in the United States require school lockdown drills¹. In Vermont, at least two “options-based” lock-down drills are required each year². There is little evidence supporting the use of school lock down drills to prevent injury and mortality from school shooters¹. Furthermore, there is a lack of consistency in drills across the nation and within Vermont^{1,2,3}.

While there has been minimal research on the mental health impacts of school lockdown drills, a recent study found prolonged disruptions in student and teacher wellbeing following a lockdown drill⁴. Researchers at Everytown and Georgia Tech found a 42% increase in anxiety and stress from pre to post drill and a 39% increase in depression^{1,4}. These findings were still prevalent 90 days following the drill^{1,4}. Impacts were noted in elementary, middle, and high school students. These impacts affect other aspects of individuals’ lives such as one’s social situation, going to work and concerns for physical health^{1,4}.

Another study assessed feelings of preparedness and safety in a community with a high rate of violence following lockdown drills. Following a lock-down drill, students report feeling less safe in the school⁵. Biracial or multiracial students were significantly less likely to report feeling safe following a drill compared to black students⁵. Black students were also significantly less likely to report feeling safe compared to white and Asian students⁵. These drills impact individuals of different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds differently. These drills are harmful to the wellbeing of our youth.

Only 73% of schools in Vermont offer on-site mental health services,³ leaving students who are significantly impacted by these drills with no school-based help. There is no way to identify youth at-risk for significant harm from such drills in these schools.

Policy Statement: The Vermont Public Health Association acknowledges the importance of evidence-based school safety and supports efforts to ensure that the mental and physical wellbeing of youth are protected while at school.

Supported Actions:

The Vermont Public Health Association supports actions related to providing schools with evidence-based lockdown drill procedures and protecting the mental wellbeing of the school community.

A moratorium on active shooter drills and options-based trainings which involve children should be instituted until more research is available on the effectiveness of this strategy and the mental health impacts of these trainings.

Should school districts choose to continue with active shooter drills in the absence of clear evidence for their effectiveness, we recommend that each school district has in place policies and procedures that:

- Parents are notified of upcoming active shooter and/or lockdown drills prior to any drills taking place¹.
- Indicate that participation in these lockdown drills is not compulsory, i.e. any student or parent on behalf of the student should have the ability to opt out of the training without consequence⁶.
- Trauma-informed approaches to ensure wellbeing of students both during and the days following a lockdown drill¹.
- Training for school faculty or staff that includes information about the potential for trauma because of lockdown drills, ways to identify risk factors for trauma, skills for talking to students who maybe experiencing trauma, and resources that are available for students who demonstrate or may have experienced trauma related to the drill^{6,7}.
- School wide debriefing discussions following a lockdown drill that allows both students and staff to discuss reactions and thoughts^{6,7}.

VtPHA supports the following:

Increased Focus on Mental Health in Schools

- Ensuring each school in Vermont has adequate mental health resources^{6,8}.
- All schools with trained mental health professionals that are proficient in identifying threats for harm during a lockdown drill^{7,8}.

Increased attention to mental health impacts of lockdown drills

- A process for screening children who may be at heightened risk of being traumatized by participation in lockdown drills so that these children can receive additional support during the drill⁷.
- Requirement that school-based mental health resources which include trained mental health providers be present in the school for at least seven days following a lockdown drill⁶.

- Enacting a formal process of reporting adverse effects from a lockdown drill⁶.
- Increased funding for research investigating the mental health impacts of school lockdown drills⁹.

Evidence-based school lockdown drills

- Increased funding for research to assess the effectiveness of school lockdown drills¹.
- Research on the various lockdown drills procedures and effectiveness of such procedures.
- Regular review of the evidence supporting lockdown drill processes⁶.
- Redefining school lockdown drill procedures to decrease stress and anxiety.

Potential Barriers:

- Strong belief school lockdown drills are needed for safety

Related Policies:

- VtPHA Policy Statement: School Health

References:

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8. Cowan K, Vaillancourt K, Rossen E, Pollitt K. A framework for safe and successful schools [Brief]. National Association of School Psychologists. https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Framework%20for%20Safe%20and%20Successful%20School%20Environments_FINAL_0.pdf. Published 2013. Accessed January 20, 2023.

9. School Safety Drill Research Act of 2021. H.R. 3421, 117th Cong. 1st session (2021).