

## Using an Injury Hotline: The Importance of Nurse Triage

By: Paul F. Binsfeld

It's a common belief that schools are safe workplaces. While it is true that schools are not as hazardous as other public services, such as law enforcement or fire fighting; teachers, support staff, and school administrators still experience a wide range of occupational injuries and illnesses, which require an immediate and compassionate response. In 2008, public elementary and secondary schools experienced a total of 284,500 non-fatal incidents, resulting in a 5.6 incident rate per 100,000 employees.

During a time when educational budgets are tightening, workers' compensation claims negatively impact a school's bottom line. Although it's well understood that prompt reporting of injuries leads to an improved ability to control costs and manage outcomes, there are still many barriers to achieving this best practice. Many schools and other public entities experience as much as a five- to ten-day delay in their injury-reporting process.

To better respond to workplace injuries and ensure the best possible care for injured workers, many school districts are now signing up to use an injury hotline, staffed with triage nurses who provide three key benefits:

1. ***Right Response for Injured Employees.*** It's the injured employees who benefit most from an injury hotline. By speaking with a nurse, they receive a highly personalized and compassionate response to what is often an upsetting workplace accident. Nurses listen closely to the nature of each injury and focus on the employee's unique medical needs. As a result, employees have an overwhelmingly positive experience in using an injury hotline.
2. ***Right Time for Reporting Injuries.*** A hotline provides an easy process to report injuries. An employee or supervisor simply calls immediately after an injury has occurred. The call center gathers all necessary injury information and sends the injury report to all appropriate stakeholders, including the supervisor, physician, claims department, and HR contact. This enables prompt notification and proactive management toward optimal outcomes. Whereas in the past, there were often delays due to stalled communication or paperwork, utilizing an

injury hotline is so streamlined that it can increase reporting on the “day of injury” to virtually 100-percent compliance.

3. ***Right Level of Care.*** Beyond timely reporting, another critical factor is ensuring that every injury receives the care and treatment appropriate to its level of medical severity. In the past, a school administrator may have been involved in directing injured employees to a healthcare facility. However, they are not trained medical professionals and should not be expected to make medical decisions.

With the injury hotline, schools are able to leverage a nurse’s medical expertise to assess injuries over the phone. Using treatment protocols and sophisticated algorithms, the triage nurses systematically identify the appropriate level of care. In severe cases, they’ll advise an ER visit. For less urgent injuries, they may recommend an occupational clinic, and with minor injuries, nurses provide simple first aid or self-care guidelines. After speaking with a nurse, many injured employees do not require or request additional medical services. As a result, 30 to 40 percent of all calls result in “report only” incidents and do not become actual claims.

### ***Right Results***

In summary, an injury hotline provides a major innovation for workers’ compensation. Triage nurses get involved at the front end of the process, making immediate, critical medical decisions that positively impact the employee’s medical care, as well as overall claims’ costs and outcomes. Since the hotline sets the claim on the right course from start, many schools and other public entities have decreased overall workers’ compensation costs by as much as 10 to 30 percent. For schools, these savings can then be applied to their true mission—a focus on student education.

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