



THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Here's why your child should see the pediatrician for a sports physical

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Want to avoid the back-to-school rush for your child's sports physical? When scheduling her next routine health supervision visit, ask to have a preparticipation evaluation, too.

Even kids who don't play organized sports should have a sports physical, because all children are potential athletes, according to new guidance from six major medical organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

"If they look like they might be remotely interested (in playing a sport), I say 'How about we answer these questions and then if you decide to go, you've got your exam done,'" said William Roberts, M.D., M.S., FACS, FFAFP, an author of the guidance. "What we're trying to do is screen children to be prepared for activity."

It's best to have the routine health supervision visit during your child's birthday month. If not, it should occur at least six to eight weeks before the sports season begins. This allows time to address any potential problems, said David Bernhardt, M.D., FAAP, an author of the guidance from the AAP.

The AAP recommends that all children receive routine health supervision visits and sports physicals from their pediatrician. This helps keep medical records and health history up to date and ensures your child is caught up on immunizations. It also gives your child a chance to discuss concerns in a confidential setting.

Steer clear of mass screenings done at school or a pharmacy clinic where the medical record and immunizations may not be available for the best care. Also, if something abnormal is found, your child likely will have to visit his primary physician. This may delay sports participation.

To save time, complete the health history form before the appointment. A separate form is available for children with disabilities. See <http://bit.ly/AAPSportsPhysical>.

"Answer the questions honestly and thoroughly," Dr. Roberts said. "That's our real window into the kids that are at risk."

Your doctor will complete the physical examination form. If your child can participate in activities without restrictions, your doctor will complete the medical eligibility form.

Some kids are not medically eligible after the initial exam, but most are cleared without restriction, Dr. Bernhardt said. If there is a family history of heart problems or other issues, getting checked out by a specialist is important.

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