

Student Health Appraisal Guidelines
NYS Department of Education
Bureau of School Health Education and Services
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INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETIC HEALTH APPRAISALS

Introduction

This section replaces all information and policies regarding participation on interscholastic athletic teams which were previously provided in the State Education Department's bulletin, "Health Related Aspect of the Physical Education Program."

The examination of an athlete requires an evaluation of the individual's health and a consideration of his or her functional ability, growth, and maturation.

The sports evaluation is not simply a procedure to qualify or disqualify a student from participation. The wide variety of sports and the different physical requirements for contact sports, endurance sports, and those that emphasize skill allow school physicians to recommend some kind of sport participation for everyone, even those with impaired health or below par in physical fitness, size, or maturation. Many individuals are qualified for participation in any sports activity. Others, because of immaturity or health problems, have some choice of activity, although it may be limited to nonstrenuous activities that require more skill than stamina.

With increased public interest in sports and physical fitness, health counseling designed to prevent injuries when possible, and, more importantly, encourage sports participation as an important, health-promoting aspect of life is an essential component of the health care of young athletes.

It has been over 10 years since the American Medical Association last reviewed its list of medical conditions that disqualify athletes from sports participation. This list had become the standard source for most primary care and school physicians who perform preparticipation examinations and decide whether an athlete should be allowed to participate. However, because of medical and society change that have taken place during the past decade, many physicians now consider some of these recommendations obsolete. The American Academy of Pediatrics has developed a new set of preparticipation guidelines which the State Education Department recommends that school and primary care physicians consider when evaluating students for participation in school athletic programs. While a thorough sports-oriented health appraisal is essential for qualifying students to participate in a school sports program, school health service and athletic department staff must develop monitoring and evaluation procedures to provide ongoing assessment of athletes during their period of sports participation and when considering involvement in a new sport during the year.

Requalification procedures are important in safeguarding the health and safety of students participating in sports activities. A reliable history of injury or illness assessment during the sports period can protect against injury and assist students who need further diagnosis and treatment.

Purpose

Health appraisals of students before participation in interscholastic athletics are performed for two reasons:

1. To provide for the health and well-being of the athlete. Knowledge of the athlete's physical status, functional ability, growth, and maturation is necessary to make a medical decision as to the level of participation in athletics.
2. To identify significant health problems which may preclude safe and effective athletic participation.

C. Legislative background

Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, Part 135.4(7)(h) require boards of education to provide adequate health examinations before participation in strenuous activity and periodically throughout the season as necessary and to permit no pupil to participate in such activity without the approval of the medical officer. In addition, Part 136.3(14) of the Regulations governing health services requires the same standards.

D. Procedures

The school physician has the final authority to determine the physical capability of a student to participate in a sport.

1. It is recommended, *but not required*, that the examination be performed by the school physician or nurse practitioner employed by the district. If the physical examination is performed by a community health care provider, the school physician must still authorize the student to participate in a sport.
2. It is recommended that the school physician consult with private physicians in all cases in question.
3. The final decision reached by the school physician must be based on two factors:
 - a. Safeguarding the health of the individual student
 - b. Assurance that the school is not exposing the student to an undue risk.
4. The examination and approval of the school physician shall indicate the category of activities in which the student may participate.
5. Medical examinations may be scheduled at any time during the school year. **The results of the examination shall be valid for qualifying a student's participation for a period of 12 continuous months.**

6. Prior to each sports season, school nursing personnel must review the student's attendance records and either interview the student to update the health history or have the parent complete an interval health history in order for the 12 months physical examination to be valid.

- All students shall have a health history interview prior to the start of tryout practice sessions and at the beginning of each season unless the student receives a full medical examination within the immediately preceding 30 calendar days.

7. Any student whose safe participation is in question as a result of the health history interview, an injury, or a prolonged absence must be requalified by the school physician prior to participation.

- The extent of injury and the nature of the illness will determine the need for requalification. This determination will be assessed on an individual basis in conjunction with school health personnel and the private health care provider, if appropriate. However, the final decision must be made by the school physician.

8. "Recommendations for Participation in Competitive Sports."

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Policy Statement, May 1988, should be the criteria used by the school physician in the decision to qualify or disqualify the athlete's participation.

- The above recommendations should only be used as a guideline. The school physician's judgment should remain the final arbiter in interpreting these recommendations for athletes on an individual basis.

9. The students' cumulative health record should be available to the examiner at the time of the physical examination.

E. Health appraisal recommendations

An athletic health appraisal should include but not be limited to:

1. An appropriate individual health history

a. Athletic health history – for the student wishing to participate for the first time in the school's interscholastic athletic program (See Sample.)

b. Interval health history – for the student wishing to participate in athletics who has been previously examined at school (See Sample: Interval Health History for Sports Participation.)

NOTE: Special attention to previous injuries, chronic diseases, and any other condition/disability that would be aggravated by sports participation (e.g., knee sprain, asthma, heart murmur) should be included in the history.

2. Screening Procedures

a. All procedures as noted under Pupil Health Appraisal

b. Urinalysis – albumin, glucose *at the discretion of the school physician*

3. Comprehensive physical examination as described in Pupil Health Appraisal with special attention to those conditions cited in AAP recommendations for participation in competitive sports.

F. Recommendations for participation in competitive sports

The preparticipation physical examination is a frequent reason for adolescent visits to a pediatrician. The most commonly used list of disqualifying conditions, published by the American Medical Association, was last revised in 1976. It has become increasingly obsolete because of changes in both safety equipment and society's attitudes toward the rights of athletes to compete despite a medical condition that may increase the risk of sustaining an injury or aggravating a preexisting medical condition. Most, if not all, sports are associated with some risk. The physician, the athlete, and the parents must weigh whether the advantages gained by participating in athletics are worth whatever risks are involved. To assist practitioners in deciding whether athletes should be allowed to participate in particular sports, the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Sports Medicine has compiled a list of recommendations. First, sport events were divided into groups depending on their degree of strenuousness and probability for collision (Table 1). These groups of sports were then assessed in light of common medical and surgical conditions to determine whether participation would create a substantial risk of injury. The committee's recommendations are included in Table 2 so that when the examiner identifies a student with one of the listed conditions, reference can be made to the recommendation.

G. Disqualification

After careful medical examination, an athlete may be disqualified by the school physician based on physical impairment. However, Education Law, Section 3208-a, provides a due process procedure to students or their parents to petition the courts for relief from a school district's exclusion of the child from participation in an athletic program. This includes participation in intramural activities, interschool activities, extramural activities, and organized practice. In the event of such disqualification, school authorities should advise the parents and the student of the availability of this process. The court may then grant

such a petition if it is satisfied that it is in the best interest of the student to participate in an athletic program and that it is reasonably safe to do so.

NOTE: If the 12-month period for the physical expires *during* a sports season, participants may complete the season as long as an interval health history was conducted prior to the season. For example, a physical conducted August 1 would be valid through August 31. If a student plays beyond August (ex. Football), the student may complete that sport season as long as an interval health history was conducted before the start of the season. Immediately following the last sanctioned tournament competition for that season, a new physical is required if the student is going to play another sport.