

Is that Sports Physical Really Necessary?

Taking the kids shopping for new clothes, getting their immunizations up to date, and buying school supplies has become sure sign of the end of summer and the start of a new school year. For many, getting a sports physical is an added burden on the list. But is it really necessary?

Approximately 30 million children and adolescents participate in organized sports in the United States. The sports physical or preparticipation physical evaluation (PPE) before the season begins has become the standard of care across the country. The goals of the evaluation include maximizing safe participation in sports by children and adolescents and identifying medical problems that could increase the risk of life-threatening complications during participation, interfere with performance, or require treatment before or during participation. The PPE can also help remove unnecessary restrictions on participation.

The PPE includes a targeted medical and family history and a targeted physical examination with particular emphasis on the musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems. The medical history is the most sensitive part of the PPE for detecting conditions that should exclude a student athlete from participating in a particular sport. Parents should carefully review their children's medical history for accuracy and completeness. History of previous muscle and joint injuries, concussions, and spine injuries should be noted as well as complaints of back pain, neck pain, or other joint pain or stiffness. It is particularly important to report symptoms of fainting, dizziness, chest pain, shortness of breath, or palpitations during exercise.

Every year there are reports of young people suffering sudden death during or shortly after participation in a sporting event. Fortunately, such events are very rare with the chance of sudden death occurring to any individual high school athlete estimated at one in 200,000 per year. The most common cause of sudden death in an athlete is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, an abnormal thickening of the muscular walls of the heart. It is a genetic disease which typically develops gradually over many years and can cause serious heart rhythm problems and blockages to the flow of blood. Far too often, these problems only come to light during exercise. The medical history and cardiovascular examination performed during the PPE by a trained healthcare professional can detect those youths at risk for this rare condition. These young people are then referred to a cardiologist for further evaluation before participation in activity which might be dangerous for them.

For more information about the benefits of the sports physical, contact the Adams County Health Department at (937) 544-5547.

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