Home Health Screening for Your Child

Parents, screenings for spine deformities are no longer being done in 7th & 8th grade PE classes. Please review these instructions and perform this simple examination annually on your child between the ages of 10-14. The purpose of spinal screening is to detect the signs of abnormal curves of the spine at their earliest stages so that the need for treatment can be determined.

What is scoliosis? Scoliosis is a side-to-side curving of the spine. It is a developmental defect and not the result of poor posture habits. About 80% of scoliosis cases have no known cause (called idiopathic). However, scoliosis can be more common in some families, which means it could be genetic.

Idiopathic scoliosis starts as a slight bend in a growing child's spine. This bend may stay the same or it may progress over time, sometimes rapidly between the ages of 10 and 15. About 10% of people with scoliosis have a very mild form of it and won't need any treatment. Many times it is unnoticeable to anyone not trained to examine for it. About 1% of people with scoliosis will have a progressive condition and need some medical treatment. In the developing stage the spine stays flexible and there is no pain to indicate progression.

Significant curves that are left untreated will continue to advance into adulthood. Left untreated, scoliosis can cause physical deformity, pain, arthritis, heart and lung complications, and can also limit physical activity.

If detected early, scoliosis can be treated before it becomes a physical or emotional disability. Frequent signs of scoliosis are: a prominent shoulder blade, uneven hip and shoulder levels, unequal distance between arms and body, uneven hemlines, and clothes that do not hang right.

Home screening tests can be done with the child having no shirt on. For girls, a bra or a swimsuit that is low enough in the back to show the lumbar spine (lower back) will be OK.

To check your child for scoliosis at home, have your child stand facing away from you. Look at your child's back and answer these questions:



1. Is one shoulder higher than the other or is one shoulder blade more prominent?
2. When his or her arms hang loosely at their sides, does one arm swing away from the body more than the other?
3. Is one hip higher or more prominent than the other?
4. Does your child seem to tilt to one side?
5. Do you see an obvious curve in their spine?

Next, ask your child to bend forward, with arms hanging down and palms together at knee level. Can you see a hump on their back at the ribs or near their waist?

Talk to a doctor if you answer "yes" to any of these questions.

Screening for scoliosis is routinely done by your child's doctor at well-child exams. It's recommended that girls be screened for scoliosis at least 2 times, at age 10 and 12. For boys screening should be done 1 time at age 13 or 14.

