

Pre-participation Physical Evaluations

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The Pre-participation Physical Evaluation (PPE) Monograph, 5th Edition was recently published in May 2019 and provides practitioners with updated guidelines on how to perform the PPE. This article will help highlight some of the changes in the new monograph and review important points regarding pre-participation physicals.

What are the goals of the PPE?

The primary goal of PPEs is detection of a condition that may impact an athlete's participation or predispose the athlete to illness or injury during competition. Secondary goals of the PPE are to discuss general age-appropriate health topics, and to fulfill legal, insurance, and sport participation requirements. Not only are PPEs an opportunity to screen for underlying cardiac conditions, but they are also a chance to discuss topics such as general medical history, previous injuries or concussions, nutrition, and female menstrual health. In addition, the new PPE monograph highlights the importance of screening for mental health in athletes.

Who should perform PPEs?

A major emphasis in the new guidelines is to have PPEs performed by an appropriately trained medical professional – an MD, DO, PA, or NP in the patient's medical home. This ensures that the patient's medical record is available and that appropriate follow up can be arranged through the primary care provider, if necessary.

Who needs a PPE?

Any child who participates in a sport or demanding physical activity! Although not every one of these individuals will need to complete a mandatory form,

the new PPE guidelines recommend that even kids in activities outside organized sports should receive a sports physical. By asking every child about physical activity at their yearly exam, it allows pediatricians to identify and counsel those who are inactive as well.

How often does an athlete need a PPE?

Every state mandates these exams be completed at different intervals, and the Ohio High School Athletic Association requires them every 13 months.

How is a PPE different from a yearly well-child exam?

They really shouldn't be! The AAP recommends yearly well child checks for ages 6-21, which is the perfect opportunity to incorporate the PPE. By discussing physical activity, incorporating PPE screening questions, and performing a comprehensive exam at every well child visit, practitioners can accomplish both goals in one visit. The mandatory PPE may be the only reason a healthy child seeks medical care, so it is important to use that encounter for general anticipatory guidance and to update vaccinations, if needed. To help save time at the visit, request that the family fills out forms prior to arrival.

What are some of the key screening items?

- Family history of cardiac abnormalities, arrhythmias, or unexplained sudden death
- Personal history of cardiac abnormalities or cardiac symptoms
- Blood pressure measurement and comprehensive cardiac exam
- Poorly rehabilitated prior injuries

- Weaknesses that may predispose to injuries
- Single organs that are normally paired
- Poorly controlled asthma
- Skin infections
- History of seizure disorder
- Visual acuity and need for corrective lenses
- Disordered eating and weight concerns
- Menstrual dysfunction
- Mental health

How should I code a sports physical?

The AAP recommends adding the code for a sports physical (Z02.5) to every well check, when appropriate. This will allow additional data to be gathered about the effectiveness of PPEs.

Who should be disqualified and where should I go for more information?

Most individuals are cleared for activity without restriction. If an athlete has a concerning finding on history or physical exam, the appropriate medical work up and/or treatment should be initiated prior to clearance. For further details, the Pre-participation Physical Evaluation (PPE) Monograph, 5th Edition is available in print or e-book on the AAP website (<https://shop.aap.org/preparticipation-physical-evaluation-5th-edition-paperback/>).