

Pre-participation Physical Evaluations

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As a new school year approaches, many parents will be looking to have a sports pre-participation physical evaluation (PPE) completed in preparation for their child's upcoming athletic season. Though many athletes and families view these exams as checklist items, they serve as an important opportunity to ensure that children are safe for their chosen activities. They are also a great time to talk to the doctor about how to keep your child healthy. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends yearly well child checks for everyone 6 to 21 years old to discuss important topics like nutrition, sleep, exercise, development, mental health, and safety. Conveniently, most doctor's offices are able to perform your child's sports PPE during their annual well child check.

Why are PPEs or, "sports physicals" as they are commonly known, important?

The primary goal of PPEs is to identify health conditions that may impact an athlete's participation or predispose the athlete to illness or injury during competition.

Where and when should PPEs be done?

PPEs should be performed by an appropriately trained medical professional - a Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), Physician Assistant (PA), or Nurse Practitioner (NP), preferably in your child's medical home, where they have access to your child's comprehensive medical history, family history, and injury history. If not included in your child's annual well check, a PPE should be performed at least 6 weeks prior to the start of your child's pre-season practice. This allows ample time for any identified evaluation, rehabilitation, or recommendations to be followed up with, while limiting any impact on your child's school or practice participation.

What is your child's doctor looking for?

- Family history of certain heart conditions or problems
- Personal history of symptoms that might suggest a heart problem
- Poorly rehabilitated prior injuries

- Developmental factors or weaknesses that might predispose to future injuries
- Contagious skin conditions
- Nutritional risks
- Menstrual health in females
- Poorly controlled asthma
- Mental health concerns
- Concussion history

How can you prepare for your child's appointment?

When scheduling the appointment, let your doctor's office know of your desire to have your child's PPE included in their well check appointment. In addition, be aware that many schools require that an Ohio High School Athletic Association Pre-Participation Physical Exam Form be completed by your child's medical provider. This form can be printed at www.ohsaa.org or by accessing your high school athletic department's specific URL. The questionnaire portion can be electronically completed, then printed and brought to your child's appointment. It is very important that these forms are completed ahead of time so they can be reviewed and discussed at your child's appointment.

How are PPEs different from an annual well check?

Well Care Visit	Sports Clearance
Discuss personal and family history.	Personal and family history via form
Evaluation of risk factors for substance abuse, driving risks, mental health, reproductive health, and long term health.	Evaluation of risk factors for sports
Head-to-toe examination and review of blood work, if appropriate, heart evaluation, blood pressure, vision and hearing, physical development, and skin evaluation.	Sports-focused physical exam
Confidential discussion of concerns with your trusted medical provider.	
Screenings and guidance for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, alcohol, drug and alcohol use, emotional well-being, mental health, education, social media use, sleep, and driving.	
Co-pay not charged for preventative visit/topics.	Co-pay charged

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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/>).