



## School Health Screening Programs - Body Mass Index

Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, Section 1402(a) states that each child of school age shall be given vision and hearing tests, a measurement of height and weight, and such other tests as the Advisory Health Board may deem advisable to protect the health of the child.

### Body Mass Index, Height & Weight Screening

The Pennsylvania Public School Code states that height and weight measurement shall be conducted at least once annually. Every effort shall be made to determine the pattern of growth for each child so that his weight and height can be interpreted in light of his own growth pattern rather than those of his classmates. Nutrition is recognized as a critical factor in the promotion of health and the prevention of disease. Moderate malnutrition can have lasting effects on children's cognitive development and school performance. When children are hungry or undernourished, they have difficulty resisting infection and therefore are more likely than other children to become sick, to miss school, and to fall behind in class. They are irritable and have difficulty concentrating; and they have low energy levels. Unhealthy eating patterns may result in under-nutrition, iron deficiency anemia, and overweight and obesity.

Overweight and obesity in children and adolescents represents one of the most challenging conditions to treat. Yet intervention is necessary as recent data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) indicates approximately one in five children in the United States is overweight, a statistic that has doubled in the last three decades. Overweight is associated with an increased incidence and prevalence of hypertension and diabetes mellitus before and during adulthood as well as with the later development of cardiovascular disease in adults (Krauss, et al. 2000).

In early 2003, the Department of Health unveiled the Pennsylvania Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan to Prevent Obesity and Related Chronic Diseases. One of the goals of this plan is to increase parent/guardian awareness of the BMI-for-Age measure as a screening tool to assess growth patterns in children and youth. BMI is a weight for stature index that can be used to help determine whether the student is within a normal growth pattern, overweight, at risk of becoming overweight or underweight.

Growth screening enables school health professionals to:

1. Monitor growth and development patterns of students;
2. Identify students who may be at nutritional risk or who may have a common nutritional problem;
3. Notify parents/guardians of screening results with a recommendation to share findings with the student's health care provider for further evaluation and intervention, if necessary.

Students are screened annually in all grades. Annual BMI results are available to parents upon request. Students will be weighed and measured in a setting that provides privacy. Confidentiality is always important and care is taken to ensure that findings are not accessible to other students or shared with staff.