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Parent Information on Scoliosis (Grades 5 through 10)

Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools is providing you with the following American Academy of Family Physicians information on scoliosis for your review:

What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is an abnormal curve of the spine. If the spine is especially curved, the ribs or hips may stick out more on one side than the other side; one shoulder may be lower than the other. Scoliosis is often not noticed until the teenage years, when the growth rate is the fastest. In most cases, the cause of scoliosis is not known. Scoliosis is more common in girls than in boys. Scoliosis does not come from carrying heavy things, athletic involvement, sleeping/standing postures, or minor differences in leg length.

Can scoliosis cause any problems?

In most people, the curve in the spine is so small that it causes no problems. In more severe cases of scoliosis, the curve may limit the amount of space for the lungs and heart to work normally.

How is scoliosis treated?

Usually no treatment is needed. If your child has scoliosis, your doctor should check your child regularly to make sure the curve isn't getting worse. Sometimes a brace is recommended to keep the spine from curving any further. Most braces fit under the clothes and are not easily seen.

Do some children with scoliosis need surgery?

If a brace does not stop the curve from getting worse, your doctor may recommend surgery that can straighten and strengthen the spine.

How can I tell if my child has scoliosis?

Your doctor may examine your child for scoliosis at a regular check-up. Your doctor may be able to tell if your child has scoliosis just by looking at your child's back when it is in different positions. Your doctor may have your child stand and bend over to touch the toes. Sometimes x-rays help show the curve in the spine.

You may also request your school nurse to perform a scoliosis screening in the clinic at your child's school. You may call your school nurse and request a Scoliosis Screening Permission Form to be completed and signed by the parent/guardian of the student. The forward bend test procedure used for the screening is simple and is performed in an area to ensure privacy. The student is asked to remove his/her shirt during the screening process. If scoliosis is suspected, the nurse will notify the parent and recommend further evaluation.