

SCOLIOSIS FACT SHEET

Scoliosis is a sideways curvature of the spine. It occurs in otherwise healthy children and can be a serious health problem if it becomes severe. It generally occurs during the growing years, especially during the growth spurt from 10 to 17 years of age. Scoliosis is more frequently noted in females and when there are other affected family members. It is not caused by anything a child or his or her parents did or failed to do, although a minority of cases are associated with other medical conditions. Early detection is essential to help avoid complications that include back pain, fatigue, reduced exercise tolerance, deformity, and, in severe cases, problems in heart and lung function.

Treatment may involve bracing. Severe curves may require spinal surgery. The need for treatment is best determined by a trained medical professional. If you suspect your child may be affected, contact your physician or contact your school nurse or the Medical Society of Northern Virginia at <http://www.msna.org/Pages/FindaPhysician.html> or 703-934-8818 for a physician referral.

Methods for early detection of scoliosis:

Direct your child to stand up straight, barefoot, with arms hanging freely at the sides. Boys should stand with shirts off; girls may wear halter tops.

1. Is one shoulder higher than the other?
2. Is one shoulder blade more prominent?
3. Does the spine seem to curve sideways?
4. Is one hip higher than the other?

Direct your child to bend forward at the waist with arms extended toward the floor.

5. Is there a hump in the rib region?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you should make sure that your child is screened by a doctor. The school public health nurse may provide screening for individual students at the request of the parent or guardian.

