

Body Mass Index (BMI)

The New York State Education Law recently required that body mass index (BMI) and weight status group be included as part of the student's required school health examination. The BMI helps the doctor or nurse know if the student's weight is in a healthy range or if it is too high or too low. The District's Physical and Health Examination form was revised effective 2008-2009 to include BMI data provided by the student's physician.

The District has been selected to take part in a New York State Department of Health "Student Weight Status Category" information survey for 2009-2010. It must submit its student BMI data to the New York State Department of Health in January 2010. It will submit only summary information, not the names and no information about individual students.

Parents choosing to have their child's information excluded from this survey report must sign a form available on the district web-site and in their child's school. Parents must return these forms to their child's school nurse by 12/30/09.

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about BMI:

Why measure BMI and weight status in students?

There is a strong and compelling need for obesity prevalence data of school-age children and adolescents at the local and state level. The information collected will be used to understand the severity and distribution of obesity among youth of various ages in different regions of the state. This is a critical first step in targeting resources for childhood obesity prevention to high-risk communities.

The information will also be used to evaluate whether actions taken by local schools, school districts and communities to improve access to healthy foods and to increase physical activity are making a difference and reducing childhood obesity rates.

Does my school or district need to revise our health certificate/appraisal forms?

The State Health Department worked with the State Education Department, the Statewide Center for School Health Services and professional medical organizations to develop a recommended Student Health Certificate/Appraisal form that schools and/or districts could adopt.

Our District has since included BMI and the weight status categories on its revised health certificate/appraisal form that is posted on the district's web-site and available in the district's health offices.

How have physicians and other healthcare providers been informed?

The DOH notified by mail all NYS-licensed pediatricians, family medicine physicians, pediatric and family medicine residents, pediatric and family nurse practitioners and healthcare providers at school-based health centers.

Does the legislation require that BMI or weight status data be reported to parents and guardians?

The new legislation does not require reporting of BMI or weight status category to parents/guardians. The healthcare provider who conducts the health examination is responsible for interpreting the student's weight status category for parents/guardians as part of routine preventive care, and for providing counseling, follow-up and referral as indicated.

How should parents/guardians be informed if a weight issue is identified during a health examination at school?

If a concern about a student's weight status is identified during the health examination performed at school, it will be handled in the same manner as other health concerns identified during the health appraisal. Typically, the school nurse will contact parent or guardian to discuss the situation and offer assistance or information if requested.

If a student's private healthcare provider doesn't return the form or if the form is incomplete, who is responsible for determining BMI and weight status category?

If the parent fails to provide the required health certificate, the information must be included as part of the school health appraisal conducted by the school district's director of health services. If the submitted health certificate is incomplete, the school nurse will return a copy of the form to the family for completion by the family's private healthcare provider.

Is there a sound basis for calculating BMI?

Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age percentiles are the standard method used to screen for childhood obesity, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

A number of studies have determined that the BMI-for-age percentile is a reliable and valid indicator of body fatness in children and adolescents.

BMI-for age percentiles have been shown to be more sensitive and specific in determining both overweight and underweight in children and adolescents than weight-for-age or height-for-age percentiles. They also facilitate the early recognition of excessive weight gain.

Current recommendations call for BMI-for-age percentiles to be used as a “screening tool,” not a diagnostic test. An individual child identified with either high or low BMI percentiles should undergo further assessment.

How do the amendments apply to students enrolled in pre-Kindergarten?

Regulations of the Commissioner of Education require a health certificate or health appraisal for each public school student at school entry, pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten and in grades 2, 4, 7 and 10. Schools selected for participation in the survey must report aggregated student weight status category data for students in the grades in which health certificates or health or appraisals are required - - either pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten based on a student’s official school entry and student number assignment.

Who should I contact if I have questions about BMI?

☐ Contact your child’s school nurse or the Director of Pupil Services at 583-4715.

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