



**To:** PSAL Staff, Athletic Directors, and Coaches  
**From:** Cheryl Lawrence, MD; Medical Director, Office of School Health  
**Date:** December 1, 2017  
**RE:** Prioritizing Sports Physical Exams for High School Students

New York City High School students who wish to participate in interscholastic sports are required to have an evaluation by a licensed healthcare provider. This exam should be completed by the student's primary care provider (PCP). For those students who are unable to access a PCP, an Office of School Health (OSH) provider may perform these exams in the school setting. There are only a limited number of OSH sports exam sessions that can be scheduled during the school year. Therefore, these sessions should be scheduled to prioritize those students who would benefit most from the services of the OSH provider. This prioritization system was developed with the following in mind:

1. The principal role of the sports exam sessions by the OSH provider is to serve those students with *limited access* to healthcare services.
2. The exam by the OSH provider in the school setting is a limited exam and does *not* replace the recommended annual physical exam by the student's PCP, which includes screening lab work, vaccines, and access to previous medical history and growth charts. Conversely, the annual comprehensive physical exam can also serve as a sports physical exam.
3. The PSAL calendar is set well in advance. Students therefore have sufficient time to make an appointment with their PCP.
4. An exam by the OSH provider does not guarantee sports clearance. Students with identified medical issues may need to be referred to their PCP and/or a specialist prior to completing the paperwork. Scheduling an appointment with the PCP prior to the start of the sports season could avoid potential delays in clearance.
5. There is currently limited OSH provider staffing in the high schools. Therefore, those students with the highest needs must be prioritized.
6. An OSH provider encounter with those prioritized students also provides the opportunity to identify unmet health issues and to link the student with appropriate health care services.

**High school students will be prioritized for sports physical exams utilizing the following protocol:**

1. Students who wish to participate in the PSAL league should be encouraged to have the medical exam/paperwork completed by their PCP. *This message must be consistent among school administrative staff, athletic directors and coaches, and OSH staff.* If a student has had a comprehensive well adolescent exam within the past year, the PCP can often complete the paperwork without repeating the entire exam.
2. The school's coaches and athletic directors should communicate with the school nurse about the need for a sports exam session *based on those students who do not have or are unable to access their PCP.*
3. If a session is able to be scheduled, students should sign up with the school nurse in advance of the OSH provider session. The medical staff will review the student's access to healthcare. Those students with limited access should receive priority during the medical session.
4. If no session is able to be scheduled, the OSH medical staff can provide resources to assist with linkage to a community provider who can complete the sports exam.

5. The OSH staff, coaches, and athletic directors should remind students at the end of the school year of the physical exam requirement for PSAL for the upcoming school year and encourage students to visit their PCP over the summer.

Performing sports exams for students must also be balanced with the other priorities of the high school program including the CATCH program and helping to manage chronic medical conditions.

Implementing a systematic approach to prioritizing high school students for sports physical exams is instrumental to accomplishing the goal of the OSH High School Program to identify and address the unmet needs of high school students. We appreciate your assistance in helping us to achieve this goal.