

Vision Screening Authorization and Overview

Authorization

[Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-273, Vision and Hearing of Student to be Tested; Exceptions.](#)

The *Code of Virginia* requires that the principal of each public elementary school, middle school and high school shall cause the vision of students enrolled in kindergarten, grade two or three, grade seven and ten to be tested, unless: any student is admitted for the first time to a public elementary school (kindergarten, grade 2 or 3), or any such student (in grade 7 and 10) produces a written record of a comprehensive eye examination performed within the preceding 24 months; the parents or guardians of such students object on religious grounds and the students show no obvious evidence of any defect or disease of the eyes; or any such student has an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan that documents a defect of vision or a disease of the eyes and the principal determines that such a test would not identify any previously unknown defect of vision or a disease of the eyes.

Vision screening may be conducted at any time during the school year; however, the *scheduling* of such screenings shall be completed within 60 administrative working days of the school year. The *Code* defines the “comprehensive vision program” that incorporates the quality-controlled requirements for vision screening. Vision screening may be conducted by a “qualified nonprofit vision health organization”, defined in the *Code* that uses a digital photo screening method following a comprehensive vision program or other methods that comply with DOE requirements.

[Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-214, Board to Prepare Special Education Program for Children with Disabilities.](#)

Regulations. [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia.](#)

For specific regulations on the following sub-sections, use the above link to access the information:

- 8VAC20-81-30. Part III: Responsibilities of Local School Divisions and State-Operated Programs.
 - Identification, Evaluation, and Eligibility.
 - 8VAC20-81-50. Child Find.
 - C. Screening.

Individual school divisions with the available resources may choose to expand the vision screening program based on the current research that suggests that all children, beginning in the newborn period, benefit from age appropriate vision screening. Early identification of conditions that interfere with vision is important, because visual stimuli are critical to the development of normal vision.

Summary. In Virginia, vision screening is required as follows:

- Component of the [School Entrance Health Form: Health Information Form/Certificate of Immunization/Comprehensive Physical Examination Report/\(MCH-213G, Rev. 03/14\)](#) (See *Code of Virginia*, [§22.1-270](#).)
- *Grades K, 2 or 3, 7, and 10*—unless any student is admitted for the first time to a public elementary school (kindergarten, grade 2 or 3), or any such student (in grade 7 and 10) produces a written record of a comprehensive eye examination performed within the preceding 24 months; the parents or guardians of such students object on religious grounds and the students show no obvious evidence of any defect or disease of the eyes; or any such student has an individualized education program or a Section 504 plan that documents a defect of vision or a disease of the eyes and the principal determines that such a test would not identify any previously unknown defect of vision or a disease of the eyes.
- The *scheduling* of vision screening shall be completed within **60** administrative working days of the school year. Screening may be conducted at any time during the school year.

Overview

Visual acuity develops swiftly from newborn age maturing “to adult levels of 20/20 vision when the child is 5 to 6 years of age”.¹ Vision screening and eye examination are essential for detecting visual impairment.² Conditions that lead to visual abnormalities may lead to inadequate school performance² and prevent students from obtaining maximum benefits from their educational experience. Undetected impairments of the visual process can lead to permanent loss of vision in the affected eye, loss of depth perception, decreased integration of visual and motor skills, potential decrease in learning ability, and problems in school adjustment.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.,2,3}

Visual acuity testing should take place as soon as the child is old enough to cooperate with an eye exam, typically around age 3.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.,2} Vision screening guidelines have been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus (AAPOS), and the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) for use by all pediatric vision screening professionals (including physicians, nurses, educational institutions, and public health departments) to standardize the process of vision screening and to detect children with vision impairments who might be overlooked. School screening programs generally focus on visual distance acuity and can include screening for near vision, color discrimination, ocular muscle imbalance, and depth perception (binocularity or stereopsis).^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} All children should receive a complete eye examination, including testing for ocular alignment, by their health care provider or an eye specialist.²

A history of vision or eye problems, family history of vision or eye problems, and parental concerns about a child's visual functioning are all important to the complete assessment of a child's vision.³

Recommendations

Procedure and Personnel. Each school division may set a policy, assigning the personnel responsible for completion of vision screening. Classroom teachers, physical education teachers, school nurses, or parent volunteers given the responsibility for vision screening should receive instruction in the proper techniques to be used.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} In addition, personnel should understand that vision screening is designed *only* to identify students who may need further attention.⁴ It is not for the purpose of diagnosis. No attempt should be made by screening personnel when contacting the parents of a student who does not meet the screening criteria to provide a diagnosis. Personnel conducting the screening should explain the test procedure to the class as a group, and individually as needed, prior to the testing to assure that students understand the purpose and the process. Confidentiality needs to be maintained; therefore, students should be screened in a private setting.

¹ Hagan, J.F., Shaw, J.S. & Duncan, P.M. (Eds.). (2017). *Bright futures: Guidelines for health supervision of infants, children and adolescents* (4th ed.). Elk Grove Village, IL: AAP. Retrieved from https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4_HealthyDevelopment.pdf

² American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). *Policy statement: Visual system assessment in infants, children, and young adults by pediatricians*. Retrieved from <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/137/1/e20153596>

³ National Association of School Nurses. (2019). *Vision and eye health*. Retrieved from <https://www.nasn.org/nasn/nasn-resources/practice-topics/vision-health>

⁴ Prevent Blindness. (2015). *Prevent blindness policy statement on school-aged vision screening and eye health programs*. Retrieved from <https://www.preventblindness.org/sites/default/files/national/positions/Prevent%20Blindness%20Statements%20on%20School-aged%20Vision%20Screening%20%20Approved%208-2015.pdf>