



November 20, 2004

Dear Colleague:

I am contacting you on behalf of the Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (PANA) to inform you about a new school health mandate that is likely to affect our practices. ***The Pennsylvania Growth Screening Program*** is part of increased outreach activities and programs by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and its partners at the Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (PANA) to educate children and their parents about the risks of being overweight and promote active lifestyles and healthy food choices.

***The Pennsylvania Growth Screening Program*** will require that a school nurse or teacher annually conduct height and weight measurements and calculate Body Mass Index (BMI - plotted on growth charts developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and record the measures in the school health record. School nurses are to inform parents about their child's results and recommend that they share the information with their health care providers. Implementation of these revised procedures will begin in September 2005 for grades K-4, and will expand three additional grades each year thereafter. Some schools are voluntarily implementing the program this school year.

It is widely known that overweight and obesity have reached epidemic proportions nationally, and Pennsylvania is no exception. In 2002, the Department of Health conducted an assessment of overweight youth in Pennsylvania. A review of over 25,000 student health records of eighth graders indicated that 18% were overweight (BMI > 95% for age and sex), and another 17% at risk for overweight (BMI 85-95% for age and sex). A recent pilot test of the revised Growth Screening Program procedures in ten schools yielded similar results of 21% and 17% respectively. It is also important to note that children with physical disabilities tend to have significantly lower levels of habitual physical activity than their non-disabled peers, putting them at even greater risk for overweight.

<http://www.panaonline.org>

PANA is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Health through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with programs delivered by Penn State.



Established by the Department of Health and supported by funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PANA is housed at Penn State. PANA assists in the implementation of the *Pennsylvania Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan to Prevent Obesity and Related Chronic Diseases*, which is designed to systematically target social and environmental factors that influence healthy eating and physical activity. The goals are directed at improving policies and practices of public agencies, communities, schools, and organizations to support healthy lifestyle choices.

We hope that this advance information will be helpful to you and your practice as Pennsylvania begins to implement its plan to address this serious problem. We encourage you to work proactively with your local school nurses to prepare for this program.

Visit the PANA website at [www.panaonline.org](http://www.panaonline.org) for more information about the Growth Screening Program and The Keystone Healthy Zone Schools campaign. The School Growth Screening Procedures are available on the Department's school health web page at [www.health.state.pa.us/schoolhealth](http://www.health.state.pa.us/schoolhealth). As this initiative moves forward, further information will become available through PANA, County and Municipal Health Departments and the Pennsylvania Department of Health. If you have questions or concerns, please call 1-877-PA-HEALTH and ask for the school Health Consultant in your area, or contact the Division of School Health at (717) 787-2390.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Cochran", is written over a horizontal line.

William J. Cochran, M.D.  
Member, Executive Committee of PANA  
Vice President, Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

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