

Fast facts about scoliosis



What is scoliosis?

Scoliosis is a sideways curve of the spine. Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) is the medical name for the most common type of scoliosis. AIS happens in children older than age 10 and teenagers. Idiopathic means that we do not know what causes it.

- The curve can make the spine look more like an “S” or a “C” than a straight line when viewed from the back.
- Scoliosis also can make the spine rotate. This can make the shoulders or waist look uneven.

What causes scoliosis?

Scoliosis tends to show up during teenage growth spurts. It also runs in families, but there is no known cause. Scoliosis is not caused by bad posture, heavy backpacks, poor diet or playing sports.

What is a scoliosis screening exam?

The exam will be at your child’s school and done by trained screeners, such as nurses, physical education teachers or parent volunteers.

- The exam will take about one minute to complete.
- Boys and girls are screened separately in private areas. Girls may wear swimsuit tops under their clothes and remove their shirts for screening. Boys will take off their shirts for the exam.

What are the signs of scoliosis?

The screener will look for certain signs during the exam, including:

When your child is standing:

- Uneven shoulders
- One shoulder blade sticking out more than the other

When your child is bending forward:

- A rib hump, called a rib prominence
- A lower back hump, called a lumbar prominence

Scoliosis does not usually cause back pain. That is why it is important to look for signs on the outside of the body.

Scoliosis is best treated when found early. It can be hard to tell if your child has scoliosis. It is important for your child to have an exam done by trained screeners in school. More serious treatments for scoliosis can be avoided when scoliosis is found early.

Visit choa.org/scoliosis for more information about the Children’s Scoliosis Screening Program.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.