

# Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol, 2018

Population and Public Health Division,  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

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## Preamble

The Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability (Standards) are published by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care under the authority of section 7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA) to specify the mandatory health programs and services provided by boards of health.<sup>1,2</sup> The Standards identify the minimum expectations for public health programs and services. Boards of health are accountable for implementing the Standards including the protocols and guidelines that are referenced in the Standards. Protocols are program and topic-specific documents incorporated into the Standards which provide direction on how boards of health shall operationalize specific requirement(s) identified within the Standards.

## Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to provide direction to boards of health on child visual health and **vision screening**\* services to be offered in the school setting.

## Reference to the Standards

This section identifies the standard and requirement to which this protocol relates.

### School Health

**Requirement 7.** The board of health shall provide, in collaboration with community partners, visual health supports and vision screening services in accordance with the *Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol, 2018* (or as current).

## Operational Roles and Responsibilities

### Pre-Screen Notification

- 1) In preparation for the school vision screening, the board of health shall:
  - a) Coordinate with schools to make prior arrangements regarding the screening dates, time and locations;
  - b) Ensure that notification is provided to parents/guardians of children in Senior Kindergarten (SK) at least 10 business days before school vision screening is scheduled to take place. This notification shall include information on:
    - i) The statutory authority under which vision screening is conducted;
    - ii) The purpose of vision screening;
    - iii) The screening processes, including clarification that vision screening is non-invasive;
    - iv) Post-screening notification to parents/guardians;

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\* Terms marked in **bold** are defined in the Glossary.

- v) The process parents/guardians should follow if they wish to opt out from vision screening; and
- vi) A contact name and telephone number parents/guardians may call if they require additional information.
- c) Confirm that pre-screen notifications have been sent to parents/guardians; and
- d) Reschedule the screening if pre-screen notifications have not been sent to parents/guardians before vision screening is scheduled to take place.

## Vision Screening

- 2) The board of health shall:
  - a) Provide, or ensure the provision of vision screening by trained individual(s), as specified by the ministry, for SK students in all schools annually.
  - b) Use vision screening tools, training, and methods as specified by the ministry for the purposes of identifying some risk factors for the following:
    - i) **Amblyopia**;
    - ii) Reduced **stereopsis** and/or **strabismus**;
    - iii) **Refractive vision disorder**.
  - c) Provide, or ensure the provision of vision screening at an alternate location as soon as reasonably possible, when requested by a parent/guardian and/or assist families in accessing an optometrist for a **comprehensive eye examination**.

## Post-Screening Notification and Follow-Up

- 3) The board of health shall:
  - a) Notify the parents/guardians of children who have been screened and identified in need of visual health services and/or treatment within two business days of completing the screening. This notification shall be by mail, telephone discussion, direct contact, or by electronic communication where available, and shall include issuing a Parent Notification Form-A (PNF-A). This form shall include a referral to an optometrist for a comprehensive eye exam.
    - i) The board of health shall provide a reminder letter to all parents/guardians of children identified in need of visual health services and/or treatment within 20 business days of the date of screening, to book an appointment with an optometrist for a comprehensive eye examination.
  - b) Notify the parents/guardians of all other children who have been screened. This notification shall be by mail, telephone discussion, direct contact, or by electronic communication where available, and shall include issuing a Parent Notification Form-B (PNF-B). This notification shall encourage parents/guardians to book an appointment with an optometrist for a comprehensive eye exam.

## Visual Health Navigation

- 4) To support awareness of, access to, and utilization of visual health services, the board of health shall:

- a) Support children and their families to improve their awareness about visual health, including the importance of early identification of vision disorders, through health promotion and targeted outreach to priority populations and/or communities;
- b) Promote awareness of school-based vision screening, OHIP-covered comprehensive eye examinations, and available visual health services through health promotion and targeted outreach to priority populations and/or communities;
- c) Utilize referral networks in order to assist families in accessing an optometrist to conduct a comprehensive eye examination;
- d) Assist families with accessing appointments and treatment as needed; and
- e) Increase awareness of available visual health services among community partners and providers.

## Data Collection and Analysis

- 5) The board of health shall:
  - a) Collect and record vision screening data as specified by the ministry as screening occurs or at the first opportunity post-screening; and
  - b) Analyze and interpret vision screening data as specified by the ministry.

## Glossary

**Amblyopia:** The medical term used when vision is reduced and not correctible to a normal level with optical devices. This condition is also sometimes called “lazy eye”. There are a variety of causes of amblyopia, including strabismus and anisometropia.”<sup>3-6</sup>

**Comprehensive Eye Examination/Periodic Oculo-Visual Assessment:** As set out in the *Schedule of Benefits*, a comprehensive eye exam/periodic oculo-visual assessment is an assessment of the eye and vision system that includes: the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disorders of refraction, sensory and oculomotor disorders and dysfunctions of the eye and vision system, and eye disease. This service includes all components required to perform the assessment (ordinarily a history of the presenting complaint, past medical history, visual acuity examination, ocular mobility examination, slit lamp examination of the anterior segment, ophthalmoscopy, tonometry) advice and/or instruction to the patient and provision of a written refractive prescription if required.<sup>7</sup>

**Refractive Vision Disorder:** A vision disorder in which the shape of the eye prevents a person from focusing well. The cause could be the length of the eyeball (longer or shorter), or changes in the curvature of the cornea or the lens. Common refractive errors are:

- Myopia, or nearsightedness: A disorder where there is clear vision close-up, but blurriness in the distance;
- Hyperopia, or farsightedness: A disorder in which distant objects can be seen clearly, but close ones do not come into proper focus;

- Presbyopia: A disorder where there is an inability to focus close-up as a result of aging;
- Anisometropia: A difference in refraction between the two eyes; and
- Astigmatism: A disorder caused by abnormality in the curvature of the cornea and/or the lens.<sup>3-6</sup>

**Stereopsis:** The ability to visually recognize depth based on differences in the images created on the two eyes. Stereoacuity is a measure of the smallest difference in the two images that can be resolved as a single image in depth.<sup>6</sup>

**Strabismus:** A disorder in which both eyes do not line up in the same direction, so they do not look at the same object at the same time. It is characterized by the misalignment of the visual axes of the eyes that affects **binocular vision** and depth perception. This results in one or both eyes turning inwards, outwards or upwards. The condition is more commonly known as "eye turn". A common form of strabismus is esotropia (the in-turning of one or both eyes).<sup>3-6</sup>

**Vision Screening:** A relatively short sequence of tests that can detect some potential risk factors of certain vision disorders. A vision screening cannot diagnose vision disorders nor is it a replacement for a comprehensive eye examination conducted by an optometrist. Vision screenings may indicate when a referral to an optometrist is necessary, but a comprehensive eye exam is a more fulsome assessment of the eye and vision system.<sup>3-4,6</sup>

## References

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