

Developmental Screening:

An Early Start to Good Health

A child's first years of life are marked by tremendous growth both physically and mentally, and detecting possible delays in development during these early years is a critical part of ensuring every child gets off to the best possible start and is well prepared to learn and grow up healthy.

Periodic developmental screenings during a child's first three years can be an important tool to identify delays in physical, social, intellectual and emotional development. If such delays are detected in these early years, children and families can be directed to resources that can identify and/or treat delays as quickly as possible.

When delays are not recognized early, children often must wait to get the supports and interventions they need. This wait could hamper a child's healthy development and possibly delay school readiness.

About 1 in 10 Pennsylvania children may experience a delay in one or more aspects of development, but Pennsylvania lacks a comprehensive way of monitoring how many children receive developmental screenings that could help detect these delays. Pennsylvania can do more to promote the use of developmental screenings, educate families about their importance and ensure children with possible delays in development receive appropriate follow-up assessments, care and interventions.



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Physical



Social/Emotional



Cognitive



How Developmental Screenings Work

A developmental screening is a series of brief questions that can help identify the presence of delays. These questions can be asked during a medical visit or in an early learning setting, such as a child care center. Typically, a child's parent or caregiver might be asked a few questions related to the child's growth and interpersonal interactions. These questions can include aspects of physical, social, intellectual and emotional development depending upon the child's age, such as:

- Does your child look at you when you mention his or her name?
- Does your child try to say words that you say?
- Is your child able to walk alone?
- Is your child enthusiastic about the company of other children?

Depending upon the responses, a few follow-up questions might be asked. While there is a large range of developmentally appropriate growth among young children, these questions can help determine whether a child might be having challenges interacting in specific ways – challenges that could be an indication that further assessment and follow-up are needed.

Additionally, parents or caregivers might have questions about how a young child is growing or interacting, but they are unaware of specific tools designed to help determine whether a possible delay in development warrants further assessment and possible intervention. A periodic developmental screening can inform parents and caregivers about options if they suspect a delay in a child's development.

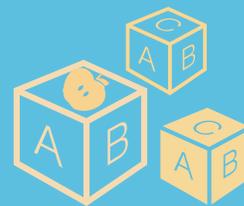
In partnership, parents and other family caregivers, health care and early learning providers can conduct a developmental screening using a validated tool, the results of which can drive referrals to appropriate services.



Parents & Families



Health Care Clinicians



Early Learning Professionals

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children be screened for possible delays in development at nine months, 18 months and 24-30 months using a standardized, validated tool. There are a series of validated screening tools that have been developed and are widely accepted by both the medical and early learning communities as being effective in assessing a possible delay in development.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends all children be screened routinely between birth and age three.



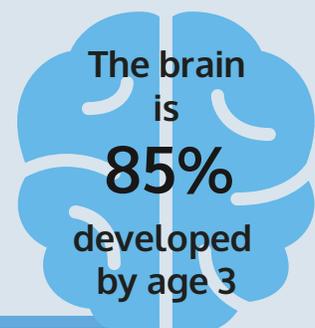
9 months



18 months



24-30 months



How Many Pennsylvania Children are Receiving Screenings?

Unlike some other states, Pennsylvania has no statewide data source for reporting on the prevalence of developmental screenings, so we do not know how many of the commonwealth's children receive one or more of the periodic screenings recommended by medical professionals.

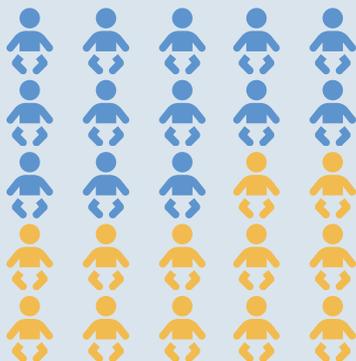
The limited data that is available indicates fewer than half of Pennsylvania children from birth to age 3 enrolled in the commonwealth's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid in 2014 were receiving recommended screens. If we don't know whether children enrolled in CHIP and Medicaid have delays in development, it is difficult to link them with the early intervention, nutrition and health care services they need.

Additionally, the commonwealth does not collect screening information from commercial insurance plans not participating in CHIP and Medicaid, so there is no comprehensive way to know whether children covered under private insurance plans are screened for delays in development.

And while there are programs and services within Pennsylvania working to connect young children and their families with quality developmental screening and early interventions in an effort to mitigate developmental delays, if children are not identified as possibly needing these services, they may not take advantage of them.

Increasing the use of developmental screenings not only helps ensure healthy outcomes for our children, it also can bring a strong return on investment. [One study finds](#) well-designed early childhood interventions can generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program.

Data from 2014 suggests...



fewer than half

of Pennsylvania's children enrolled in CHIP and Medicaid receive developmental screenings helping to identify early delays and make referrals for appropriate services such as early intervention, nutrition, and health care.

Pennsylvania Can Do Better

Clearly, more can be done to promote awareness and use of developmental screenings in the commonwealth, determine how many children are receiving the screenings and monitor whether those identified with possible delays in development are receiving appropriate referrals for follow-up assessments and/or care.

Pennsylvania should take the following steps:

1 Step One...

The Department of Human Services should mandate developmental screenings during a child's first three years of life at intervals recommended under the American Academy of Pediatrics' Bright Futures standards (nine months, 18 months and 24-30 months) for children enrolled in CHIP and Medicaid. This mandate should be included as part of managed care contracts between DHS and health plans providing CHIP and Medicaid.

4 Step Four...

A public awareness campaign should be initiated at the state level to increase understanding about the importance of developmental screenings and to share resources and information with families on access to screenings, referrals, interventions and follow-up options. The commonwealth could expand and enhance use of the 2-1-1 call center or consider becoming a "Help Me Grow" state to improve service coordination.

2 Step Two...

When a possible developmental delay is identified during a screening that takes place in a health care setting at nine, 18 and 24-30 months, DHS should mandate steps be taken by CHIP and Medicaid managed care organizations to ensure any appropriate follow-up assessments and/or care coordination takes place. Possible delays that are identified at other times must also be further assessed and have care coordinated, as appropriate. Steps must be taken to ensure public resources are available to meet a child's full needs and to promote effective communication between all medical and non-medical service providers to improve collaboration in service delivery.

5 Step Five...

The state should engage in strategic partnerships with organizations and entities - such as the Medical Assistance Advisory Committee, CHIP Advisory Committee, Pennsylvania Early Learning Council, the State Interagency Coordinating Council or PA Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) - that share the goal of increasing access to developmental screenings, assessment and care coordination in both health care and early learning settings to ensure that their goals and work are better aligned.

3 Step Three...

The commonwealth should take steps to promote better communication and information sharing between parents and early learning providers to help make families aware of the availability of developmental screenings and the age intervals at which such screenings should be conducted, and to help providers give guidance when referrals are needed. The commonwealth should expand use of the Master Client Index to include all early learning programs so that a unique identifier is available to determine which children still need to have a developmental screen completed.

Early identification and treatment of delays in a child's development is an important part of helping every child reach his or her fullest potential. When possible delays are detected early on and timely treatment is provided, children are better prepared for school and the lifetime that awaits them. Pennsylvania needs to find a better way to make sure children are screened for developmental delays to help them get the best possible start in life.

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