

Frequently Asked Questions about Student Weight Status Category Reporting

Legislation passed in 2007 amends Education Law Sections 903 and 904 to provide for a system to assess the prevalence of childhood obesity throughout New York State (NYS). Letters about the new legislation were sent to superintendents, principals and school nurses at all public schools (excluding those in the five boroughs of NYC which are exempt from NYS Education Law Sections 903 and 904). Schools and school districts were invited to voluntarily participate in the 2007-2008 pilot year. In year 2008-2009 a sample of schools will be required to report.

What do the amendments involve?

- The amendments require each student's health certificate or health appraisal to include an assessment of Body Mass Index (BMI) and weight status (based on BMI-for-age percentile), including obesity, beginning with the 2008-2009 school year. Regulations of the Commissioner of Education require a health certificate or a health appraisal for students at school entry, pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten and in grades 2, 4, 7 and 10.
- The amendments require a sample of public schools to report an aggregated summary of students' weight status categories to the State Health Department. School staff, predominantly school nurses, will aggregate the numbers of students in the following six weight status categories based on sex-specific BMI-for-age percentiles:
 - Less than 5th percentile,
 - 5th to 49th percentile,
 - 50th to 84th percentile,
 - 85th to 94th percentile,
 - 95th to 98th percentile, and
 - 99th and above.

These data will be reported separately by sex and grade (pre-K or K, 2, 4, 7 or 10) to the State Health Department electronically via the Health Provider Network (HPN). This process is similar to the way in which schools report aggregated immunization data to the State Health Department.

What is the Health Provider Network (HPN) and how do we get accounts?

- The HPN is the State Health Department's secure internet site. It allows confidential data to be sent to the Department electronically. To use the HPN, schools and districts will need to designate users from each school and a district level coordinator to review and submit the data to the State Health Department. Schools that have HPN accounts for submission of immunization data will be able to use the same accounts for weight status category data reporting.

Why measure BMI and weight status in students?

- There is a strong and compelling need for obesity prevalence data of school-age children and adolescents at the local and state level. The information collected will be used to understand the severity and distribution of obesity among youth of various ages in different regions of the state. This is a critical first step in targeting resources for childhood obesity prevention to high-risk communities.
- The information will also be used to evaluate whether actions taken by local schools, school districts and communities to improve access to healthy foods and to increase physical activity are making a difference and reducing childhood obesity rates.

Does my school or district need to revise our health certificate/appraisal forms?

- The State Health Department worked with the State Education Department, the Statewide School Health Services Center and professional medical organizations to develop a recommended Student Health Certificate/Appraisal form that schools and/or districts may wish to adopt. The new recommended Student Health Certificate/Appraisal Form and modifiable version are available from the Statewide School Health Services Center at http://www.schoolhealthservices.org/laws_guidelines.cfm
- Schools/districts must include BMI and the weight status categories on their health certificate/appraisal form.
- We also encourage the collection of optional information regarding obesity related diseases, if known, although this is not required by law.

How have physicians and other healthcare providers been informed?

- All NYS-licensed pediatricians, family medicine physicians, pediatric and family medicine residents, pediatric and family nurse practitioners and healthcare providers at school-based health centers were notified by mail.

Does the legislation require that BMI or weight status data be reported to parents/guardians?

- The new legislation does not require reporting of BMI or weight status category to parents/guardians. BMI and weight status category are to be added to the Student Health Certificate/Appraisal required by New York State Education Law Sections 903 and 904. It is the responsibility of the healthcare provider who conducts the health examination to interpret the weight status category for each student and his/her parents/guardians as part of routine preventive care, and to provide counseling, follow-up and referral as indicated.

Won't this process take a substantial amount of time, particularly for those schools where the majority of the required health examinations are performed by school medical staff?

- Completion of the examination, with results filed and documented on the cumulative health record is not a new requirement. For health examinations performed at school, BMI can be calculated quickly from a student's height and weight using a BMI calculator wheel or computer program. Weight status category is determined by plotting the BMI on a sex-specific BMI-for-age percentile growth chart. For free BMI calculator wheels and/or BMI percentile growth charts please email schoolbmi@health.state.ny.us or download the order form available at http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/obesity/bmi_screening_tools.htm
- Once obtained, these measurements should not take long to document on the health record.
- The legislation, New York State Education Law Sections 903 and 904, states that a representative sample of schools must participate in a survey – schools will not be required to submit data every year, but they are welcome to if they choose. Voluntary reporting during an academic year a school is not selected to participate in the survey does not exempt the school from reporting during the year the school is selected and required to participate in the survey.

How should parents/guardians be informed if a weight issue is identified during a health examination at school?

- If a concern about a student's weight status is identified during the health examination performed at school, it should be handled in the same manner as other health concerns identified during the health appraisal.

Will there be forms or an electronic file to tally the number of students in each of the weight status categories? Can tallying be done as forms are received or physicals are performed rather than retrieving files to tally by grade?

- The State Health Department developed instructions and reference materials including tools for school staff to tally the number of students in each weight status category by grade and sex, the number of students in the 99th and greater BMI-for-age percentile, and with obesity-related health conditions by grade. These tools can be used as individual health certificate forms are received, as appraisal examinations are conducted, or after all school physicals have been completed. An electronic file for tallying is no longer available.
- Instructions and reference materials are available from the New York Statewide School Health Services Center website under the "State Reporting" section at <http://www.schoolhealthservices.org/statereporting.cfm>
- They are also available on the Health Provider Network (HPN—User Id and password required) at https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/cch/hlthrisk/weight_stat.html

Will there be a letter our school can send to parents/guardians to let them know about the legislation?

- Yes. Sample parental notification language has been developed and is available from the New York Statewide School Health Services Center at <http://www.schoolhealthservices.org/statereporting.cfm> and on the Health Provider Network (HPN—User Id and password required) at https://commerce.health.state.ny.us/hpn/cch/hlthrisk/weight_stat.html .
- Schools may provide notice to parents via the school newsletter, website, the pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten registration packet, and/or other reasonable means.

What is the nurses' role in calculating Body Mass Index (BMI) and determining weight status category (based on BMI-for-age percentile)?

- The amendment to Education Law Sections 903 and 904 was written to incorporate BMI and weight status category determination as part of the health certificate or health appraisal. Only the school medical director can perform and complete the health appraisal, and only a student's healthcare provider may perform and complete a health certificate.
- For health appraisals completed at the school, a medical director may choose to have a written policy stating that the school nurses in his/her district can perform the height and weight measurement, calculate the BMI and determine the weight status category. The school nurse may write these on the health certificate form for the provider if requested. However it is the responsibility of the medical director to interpret the weight status category and what effect it may have on the student's health. By signing the health appraisal form, the medical director is taking responsibility for the information on the form and is ensuring that any identified health problems are reported to the parent to arrange for follow-up.
- A health certificate completed by a private healthcare provider must include the BMI and weight status category information. A school nurse may not just fill in the missing BMI and weight status category information.

What happens if a student's private healthcare provider doesn't return the form or if it is incomplete? Who is responsible for determining BMI and weight status category?

- If the parent fails to provide the required health certificate, the information should be added as part of the school health appraisal conducted under local district policy. If the health certificate is incomplete, it would be advisable for the school nurse to return a copy of the form to the family for the family's private healthcare provider to complete.
- If the health certificate is not returned or is returned but does not contain the weight status category, then the student's weight status category should be tallied under the "missing" category.

What is the efficacy of BMI?

- Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age percentiles are the standard method used to screen for childhood obesity, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians.
- A number of studies have determined that the BMI-for-age percentile is a reliable and valid indicator of body fatness in children and adolescents.
- Furthermore, BMI-for age percentiles have been shown to be more sensitive and specific in determining both overweight and underweight in children and adolescents than weight-for-age or height-for-age percentiles. Their use also facilitates the early recognition of excessive weight gain.
- Current recommendations call for BMI-for-age percentiles to be used as a “screening tool,” not a diagnostic test. An individual child identified with either high or low BMI percentiles should undergo further assessment.

How do the amendments apply to students enrolled in pre-Kindergarten?

- Regulations of the Commissioner of Education require a health certificate or health appraisal for each student at school entry, pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten and in grades 2, 4, 7 and 10. Schools will be required to report aggregated student weight status category data for students in the grades in which health certificates or health appraisals are required. Schools will be required to report aggregated student weight status category data for either pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten based on a student’s official school entry and student number assignment.

Will schools be required to report aggregated weight status category data for new entrants other than those in pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and grades 2, 4, 7 and 10?

- No. Schools should report aggregated student weight status category data only for students in pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten and in grades 2, 4, 7 and 10. Aggregated student weight status category data will not be required for new entrants in any other grade.

Why do I receive the error message, “Field value cannot be less than 5,” on the Weight Status Category Survey or the Obesity-Related Health Conditions Survey?

- You will receive the above error message if you enter a 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 in any of the weight status category or obesity-related health conditions fields. If the number of students in a weight status category or health condition field is less than five, you must leave the field blank. Numbers in these fields must be greater than or equal to five to protect student confidentiality and maintain compliance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Numbers less than five can be reported for the following fields on the Weight Status Category Survey:
 - “How many boys or girls are in this grade?”
 - “How many boys or girls are missing information?”
 - “How many parents requested that their child’s data be excluded from the survey for this grade and sex?”