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Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine

NAP Policy for Examining Genitalia of Boys and Girls

The providers at NAP feel it is very important for our patients and families to feel comfortable with all aspects of the care they receive at NAP. It is also important for providers to complete a thorough exam at both routine physical exams and other times as different symptoms may indicate specific body parts be examined. Sometimes those examinations, particularly the examination of the genitalia, can result in questions or temporary feelings of discomfort. Therefore, we have written this policy to explain what these routine exams would typically involve and why these exams are important.

Boys at all ages are examined to make sure that their testicles have descended into the scrotum and checked for hernias (masses in the scrotum), enlargements of blood vessels (varicoceles) and various cysts. Testicular palpation is performed to make sure there are no lumps or bumps consistent with cancer.

Girls are checked to make sure there is an opening to the vagina and that the labia are not fused. This exam starts as a newborn and sometimes continues throughout the adolescent years. However, the exam is often omitted after preschool years if previous exams of the genital area have been normal.

All children are checked at yearly physicals with inspection of both the breasts and external pubic area (the area above the genitals) to document stages of development such as size and hair. This is important to determine if there is any abnormality in hormonal production.

Because this is a sensitive area, it is not uncommon for children to giggle, squirm, tense up, pull away or show other signs of discomfort during the exam. If a child appears uncomfortable, the provider will use her or his best judgement in gauging the importance of the exam. Providers might decide to forgo the exam for another time if in their minds the value of the exam does not outweigh any discomfort they, or a family member, perceives that the child may be experiencing.

In order to try to minimize discomfort but still obtain an adequate exam, it is possible the providers might follow some of the following procedures which may vary depending on the age of the child and the clinical circumstances:

- Explaining why the exam is important
- Explaining that this is a private area and only doctors or nurse practitioners are allowed to touch these areas
- Having chaperones in the room during the exam
- Examining the child while either lying down or standing
- Wearing or not wearing gloves
- Having a family member hold or lay a hand on the child during the exam.

As always, we value feedback from our patients and families. If there are questions about this policy please feel free to discuss it with your provider.