Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis (AIS) is a lateral curvature of the spine >10 degrees as measured on standing PA X-ray. AIS is found in children >10 years of age without underlying conditions and is more common in girls than boys. Children at risk of progression have curves >20 degrees and significant growth remaining (premenarchial girls and skeletally immature boys). Right thoracic curves are most common. Small and moderate sized curves are not associated with long-term problems. Large curves can cause significant pulmonary issues later in life.

**ASSESSMENT**

Perform a standard history and physical examination with probing questions around family history of AIS, patient menstrual status, and pain. Pain is uncommon but does occur.

Examine patient from behind in a standing position and in forward bend. Signs of AIS include asymmetry of the shoulders, scapula and waist, but rotation on Adams forward bend test is the hallmark sign. Rotation >5 degrees on a scoliometer is associated with 90% chance of the presence of a curve. Examine skin for unusual markings or hairy patches. Perform quick neurologic exam to assess reflexes and Babinski sign. If you suspect a curve, obtain standing PA and lateral full-length spine film.

**MANAGEMENT/TREATMENT**

- Most curves less <20–25 degrees can be followed with standing PA X-rays every 6 months. End surveillance X-rays one year after menarche in girls, or Tanner 4 in boys.
- Moderate curve sizes (25–30 degrees) in children with significant growth remaining (girls who are premenarchal or with 1 year of menses, or boy who are skeletally immature) are good candidates for bracing.
- Curves >50 degrees are candidates for surgical treatment, particularly Posterior Spinal Instrumentation and Fusion. Vertebral Body Tethering (VBT) is a newer technique that may provide correction without spinal fusion in children with significant growth left.

**WHEN TO REFER**

Refer to Cincinnati Children’s Orthopedics for further evaluation and management if:

- Curve is greater than 20 degrees
- Unsure, referral is better course of action

If you have clinical questions about patients with AIS, email orthopedics@cchmc.org

If you would like additional copies of this tool, or would like more information, please contact the Physician Outreach and Engagement team at Cincinnati Children’s.

---

**FAST FACTS**

- **>10 degrees**: lateral curvature of spine indicating AIS in otherwise healthy children age 10+

- **2%**: incidence in general population

- **2/3**: of AIS patients have a positive family history of AIS

- **10–15%**: of curves progress

---

**HPE RED FLAGS**

- **Left thoracic curve**—may be associated with intraspinal pathology (Chiari, syrinx, tethered cord)
- **Asymmetric reflexes, positive Babinski sign**—may be associated with intraspinal pathology as above
- **Sacral dimple, hairy patch on back**—may correlate with intraspinal findings
- **Severe back pain**
Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis

**Inclusion Criteria**
- Child 10+ years of age
- Asymmetry of trunk
- Rotation on forward bend

**Patient Presents**

**Standard Workup**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational History</th>
<th>Family History</th>
<th>Physical Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>AIS in family</td>
<td>Check for asymmetry of shoulders, scapula, waist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HPE RED FLAGS**
- Left thoracic curve
- Asymmetric reflexes, positive Babinski sign
- Sacral dimple, hairy patch on back
- Severe back pain

**Is >20 degree curve present?**
- Yes
  - Small curves—observation over time
  - Moderately sized, progressive curves—bracing
  - Large curves—surgery

- No
  - Small curves, <20–25 degrees: Follow with standing PA X-rays every 6 months. End surveillance X-rays one year after menarche for girls, or Tanner 4 in boys.

For urgent issues, or to speak with the specialist on call 24/7, call the Physician Priority Link at 1-888-636-7997.