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 (premenarchal 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.

**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

**MANAGEMENT/TREATMENT OF AIS**

- 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

Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis 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 (premenarchal 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.
Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis

Inclusion Criteria

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

Patient Presents

Standard Workup

Situational History
- Pain

Family History
- AIS in family

Physical Exam
- Check for asymmetry of shoulders, scapula, waist
- Check rotation on Adams forward bend test, >5 degrees on scoliometer
- Unusual markings on skin or hairy patches
- Assess reflexes and Babinski sign
- Obtain standing PA and lateral full-length spine films

HPE RED FLAGS

- Left thoracic curve
- Asymmetric reflexes, positive Babinski sign

- Sacral dimple, hairy patch on back
- Severe back pain

Red Flags Present?

Yes

Refer to Cincinnati Children’s Orthopedics

Small curves — observation over time

Moderately sized, progressive curves — bracing

Large curves — surgery

No

Is >20 degree curve present?

Yes

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.

No

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