



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health / CEO
DATE: 2019 July 18

CHILD VISUAL HEALTH AND VISION SCREENING PROTOCOL

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1) *Receive Report No .052 -19 re: “Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol” for information; and*
- 2) *Endorse staff communicating with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to request that the vision screening requirements of the Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol (2018) be waived for MLHU.*

Key Points

- In August 2018, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) released the new Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol to be implemented during the 2018–19 school year, with no additional base funding.
- Local school boards have expressed concerns about obtaining parental consent and the time required during the school day to conduct the screening in the absence of evidence of effectiveness.
- Children in Ontario are eligible for a free annual eye examination by an optometrist.
- It is recommended that the Board of Health request that the vision screening requirements of the Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol (2018) be waived for MLHU.

Background

In August 2018, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) released the new Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol (2018) to be implemented during the 2018–19 school year. No additional base funding was provided for protocol implementation, although health units could apply for one-time funding to purchase required vision screening equipment.

The protocol directs boards of health to offer annual vision screening services to all senior kindergarten students in all publicly funded elementary schools. The document indicates that the purpose of vision screening is to use screening tools, training, and methods as specified by the Ministry to identify children with some risk factors for the following: amblyopia, reduced stereopsis and/or strabismus, and refractive vision disorder. If children are identified as having one risk factor present, the Board of Health shall notify parents using a parent notification form. The Board of Health is also required to support awareness of, access to, and utilization of visual health services.

Steps Taken to Date

Upon release of the protocol, Health Unit staff initiated conversations internally to determine how to allocate resources to support implementation of the protocol. In particular, the Healthy Living Division discussed which team(s) could conduct vision screening and take responsibility for the purchase of the required equipment. Although all teams had limited capacity, it was decided that the Oral Health and Child Health teams would lead vision screening in schools.

MLHU submitted a request for one-time funding to the MOHLTC to assist in the purchase of vision screening tools. One-time funding was approved; however, approval was communicated to MLHU after the required deadline to purchase the equipment, and the funds could not be utilized.

Staff completed an environmental scan to determine what services were being offered in local school board jurisdictions. MLHU also initiated discussions with local stakeholders and school boards to determine how to implement the vision screening protocol. The school boards expressed a number of concerns regarding implementation. In particular, they were concerned with obtaining parental consent and with the estimated time required to complete the screening process during the school day in the absence of evidence of effectiveness of this type of screening.

As a result of a lack of funds to purchase equipment and concerns within the school boards, implementation of the vision screening protocol during the 2018–19 school year was not possible.

Recommendation

Due to multiple challenges in implementing vision screening in schools, and considering universal vision screening has not been shown to be effective, also that the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers an annual full comprehensive eye examination by an optometrist and any follow-up assessments that may be required for children aged 0 to 19, MLHU is recommending that the Board of Health endorse staff contacting the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to request an exemption from the vision screening portion of the Child Visual Health and Vision Screening Protocol (2018). MLHU will continue to work with school boards to support awareness of, access to, and utilization of visual health services by notifying parents of the importance of visual assessments and assisting parents in finding a local optometrist.

This report was submitted by the Healthy Living Division.



Christopher Mackie, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health/CEO