

Auditory and Visual Screening Guidance
Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic
January 13, 2021

Introduction

The Washington State Board of Health sets standards in [chapter 246-760 WAC](#) for the auditory and visual screening of children attending schools in Washington under the authority provided in RCW 28A.210.020. The purpose of this requirement is to screen for and identify students in Washington who may be experiencing auditory or visual impairments and refer for care by an appropriate healthcare provider.

The Board recognizes the importance of keeping students, staff, and their families safe and healthy at all times and particularly during these extraordinary times. This document provides guidance for school districts regarding the requirements for the auditory and vision screening of students during the pandemic.

For the 2020-21 School Year Only

- Recognizing the COVID-19 public health crisis and the additional duties placed on school personnel, we are not recommending conducting auditory or visual screening for students who are fully participating in remote learning. Schools should distribute information about warning signs of an auditory or visual impairment to families of those students participating in remote learning. Families should be provided information on next steps in case they identify a risk factor in their student.
- Schools should continue to provide screenings when feasible and provide messaging to families, staff, and others who may be able to identify students at risk for an auditory or visual impairment.
- If a student is participating in full-time in-person learning, districts are encouraged to conduct screenings as described in [chapter 246-760 WAC](#) to the extent the screenings can be safely conducted during the pandemic.
 - o Schools may consider coordinating with institutions of higher education whose students would benefit from the experience of conducting auditory and/or visual screenings.
- If a student is participating in partial in-person learning screenings that can be conducted safely should be prioritized for those students who exhibit warning signs and those students of the youngest age.
 - o Children born early, those with delays in their growth, or with neurological conditions are at greater risk of vision problems.
- We do not recommend the utilization of telehealth or remote screening products to conduct auditory and visual screenings at this time.

Suggested Messages for Parents and Families

- It is recommended that families monitor their students for auditory and vision impairments using available resources (see attachments or [Signs of Possible Eye Problems in Children - Prevent Blindness](#)).
- Ensuring students' vision and hearing is not impaired is essential to continued success in learning, both in-person and virtually. If a parent or guardian has a concern about their child's vision, they should make an appointment with a licensed vision care professional such as an ophthalmologist or optician.
- Taking a student to a well-child visit is beneficial for a student's health, including their vision and hearing. Well-child visits, while not a replacement for school-based screenings, may capture an auditory or vision impairment.