

# Pennsylvania State Board of Occupational Therapy Education and Licensure Newsletter

June 2009

dos.state.pa.us

## Do I Need a Physician Referral to Work with Children in Schools?

Often therapists working with children in schools or in early intervention programs ask if a physician referral (doctor prescription) is needed to provide an evaluation or occupational therapy services in school or preschool settings.

The vast majority of the services outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) fall well within the realm of non-medical services and therefore do not require physician referral. The IDEA, a federal law that governs school-based and preschool services, specifically addresses concerns which are related to participation in the school environment, as opposed to remediating the physical or cognitive effects of a particular disorder or disease.

In schools and early intervention, when addressing issues that are not specifically targeted at treating the medical condition, occupational therapy services may be provided without a physician referral.

As per section 14 of the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Practice Act, a physician referral from a licensed physician is required to implement direct occupational therapy to an individual for a specific medical condition. An occupational therapist may provide indirect service, consultation, and evaluate an individual for perceptual, cognitive, sensory integration and similar conditions without the referral of a licensed physician.

When working in the schools with a student with cerebral palsy, for example, a prescription is not needed for the vast majority of services rendered

For the school-based or preschool occupational therapy practitioner, the focus of therapy is to enable the student to participate and make meaningful progress in his or her school day. Various adaptations may be necessary to facilitate written work, self-care tasks and leisure participation, none of which would be treating the medical condition of cerebral palsy, and therefore would not require a prescription.

Obtaining a physician referral is an option that a school-based or early intervention occupational therapy provider may pursue, if desired; however, both the IDEA law and the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Practice Act enable the provider to work within a school without such documentation from a physician.

## Links of Interest to Health Professionals

- [2009 Novel Influenza A \(H1N1\)](#), information from the PA Department of Health
- [Clean Hands Save Lives](#), protecting Pennsylvanians from acquiring hospital infections

## Other News:

- [Disciplinary Actions](#)
- [PA Becomes Smoke-Free](#)
- Learn more about how stimulus money will help PA residents and businesses, [www.recovery.pa.gov/](http://www.recovery.pa.gov/).
- [Here to Help](#) State programs to help in these tough times

## Governor's Newsletter

[Sign up now](#) to receive the weekly e-newsletter from Governor Rendell on important issues facing Pennsylvania.

[Contact Us](#)

[Report Unethical Activity](#)

[Renew Your License](#)

[Meet the Board](#)