



Overview

High blood pressure and hypertension can have negative impacts on children and youth. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued Clinical Practice Guidelines in 2017 with recommendations for physicians to screen for high blood pressure, follow-up on high blood pressure readings, and to manage hypertension. This study explored how pediatricians and family medicine physicians use these recommendations in practice.

Researchers asked physicians

- How concerned are you about hypertension?
- How familiar are you with the AAP's guidelines?
- What is your workflow for screening blood pressure and how much attention do you pay to these screenings?
- What typically happens after a blood pressure screening is high?
- What is your usual practice when a child is diagnosed with hypertension?

Study

- We interviewed 11 pediatric and family medicine physicians from the UMass Memorial Health System in Worcester, MA.
- The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Using rapid qualitative analysis we identified themes across the interviews.
- The study was approved by the UMass Chan Medical School Institutional Review Board.

Bottom Line

- Currently, the UMass Memorial System does not have system-wide protocols or algorithms for evaluating or managing pediatric hypertension.
- Physicians response to high blood pressure readings may be impacted by:
 - Too many alerts in the electronic health record
 - Measurement challenges
 - Lack of trust in the actual blood pressure values
- Physicians' perspectives are critical to understand barriers, and to inform system-wide efforts to improve adherence to AAP guidelines for pediatric blood pressure screening, follow-up, and hypertension management.

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Source

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Spotlight on Results:

- Physicians are concerned about pediatric hypertension, but other health concerns often take precedence during clinical visits.
- Physicians are generally familiar with screening guidelines.
- Blood pressure screening occurs mainly during yearly well-child visits.
- Barriers to effective follow-up and treatment include lack of trust in accuracy of blood pressure readings, variability in follow-up, challenges in parents returning for follow-up visit, and lack of guidance and resources for caring for these patients.
- Recommendations for improvement include creating systems for evaluating and managing pediatric hypertension, educational materials for parents and physicians, workflows for blood pressure management, and training for co-managing hypertension with specialists.

Call for Action

System wide efforts could support pediatric and family medicine physicians to effectively identify and manage high blood pressure in youth.