Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): Screening and Diagnosis

Definition: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a genetically as well as environmentally determined disorder with a high rate of neurodevelopmental, learning, and psychiatric comorbidity. ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate and disabling levels of inattention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity that impair social, educational, or occupational functioning across settings. Symptoms fall into two categories: 1) inattention and 2) hyperactivity and impulsivity.

There are three different types of ADHD, depending on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual:
- Predominantly Inattentive Presentation: It is hard for the individual to organize or finish a task, to pay attention to details, or to follow instructions or conversations. The person is easily distracted or forgets details of daily routines.
- Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation: The person fidgets and talks a lot. It is hard to sit still for long (e.g., for a meal or while doing homework). Smaller children may run, jump or climb constantly. The individual feels restless and has trouble with impulsivity. Someone who is impulsive may interrupt others a lot, grab things from people, or speak at inappropriate times. It is hard for the person to wait their turn or listen to directions. A person with impulsiveness may have more accidents and injuries than others.
- Combined Presentation: Symptoms of the above two types are equally present in the person.

As the child ages, symptoms of hyperactivity decrease while impairment from inattention and impulsivity might increase.

Epidemiology: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) occurs in roughly 3–5% of all children and adolescents. Children with ADHD often show comorbid psychiatric disorders (anxiety disorders: approximately 30%, oppositional defiant disorder: approximately 50%, learning disabilities: approximately 50%, and motor incoordination: approximately 50%), which also strongly influence the clinical outcome of the disorder.

Etiology: There is evidence that the cause of ADHD can be genetic or environmental. Non-genetic causes of ADHD are neurobiological in nature and consist of factors such as perinatal stress and low birthweight, traumatic brain injury, maternal smoking during pregnancy, severe early deprivation and maltreatment, and lead toxicity.

Inclusion Criteria
Patients with suspected or diagnosed ADHD who are 6 to 18 years of age.

Exclusion Criteria
Patients younger than 6 years of age - Consider referral to specialty care for further evaluation to confirm diagnosis.

Differential Diagnosis
The following conditions are often comorbid with ADHD, but can also mimic ADHD:
- Oppositional defiant disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Anxiety disorder
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Mood disorder (Mania, Bipolar disorder, Depression)
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Language or learning disorder
- Intellectual disability
- Substance abuse
- Poor sleep hygiene
- Sleep deprivation

Diagnostic Evaluation
History: Assess for
- Family history (e.g., ADHD, other neurodevelopmental disorder)
- Birth history/Pregnancy complications
- Medical history (e.g., history of seizures, history of lead poisoning)
- Developmental milestones
- School history
- Social history
- Treatment history
- ADHD symptomatology
  o Symptomatic for >6 months
  o Several symptoms evident prior to 12 years of age in at least 2 environments (e.g., home and school)
  o Symptoms severe enough to interfere with function

* This assessment may be completed over multiple visits.

Physical Examination
- Skin findings, birthmarks
- Neurologic exam
- Growth
- Head circumference
- Dysmorphic features
- Development assessment
Evidence Supports
- Recommendation for the use of rating scales or tools that screen and assess the presence and severity of ADHD only or that of commonly comorbid conditions as well (6-21)
- Recommendation for the referral to a specialist when a significant comorbidity or elevated level of complexity exists (22-28)
- Recommendation for the use of certain rating scales or tools to screen for comorbidities (29-33)

Evidence Against
N/A

Evidence Lacking/Inconclusive
- Recommendation for the utilization of a rating scale or tool in the ADHD screening and diagnosis process; a rating scale is necessary but insufficient to establish an ADHD diagnosis
- No recommended time during the course of treatment for screening for comorbidities

NOTE: The references cited represent the entire body of evidence reviewed to make each recommendation.

Practice Recommendations

Screening and Diagnostic Tools
The following rating scales or tools should be used for screening and diagnosis of ADHD:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conners Rating Scales - Revised</td>
<td>20 min. duration; self, parent, or teacher versions; Six distinct scales; 3-17 years for parent/teacher version and 12-17 years for self-version</td>
<td>Proprietary ($273/kit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC)</td>
<td>10 -30 min. duration for parent and teacher version; 6-21 years</td>
<td>30 min. duration for self-report version; 100-160 items (vary by version); Proprietary ($132.20 – 1,655/kit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)</td>
<td>15-20 min. duration; parent or caregiver/teacher for 1.5 to 5 years: 99 items; parent/teacher: 118 items Test-retest: 0.95 to 1.00 Inter-rater reliability: 0.93 to 0.96 Internal consistency: 0.78 to 0.97 Criterion validity was assessed and found to be acceptable.</td>
<td>Responses need to be entered and scored; Electronic scoring available; Proprietary ($310-435/kit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC-Y/ PSC-35 – self and parent assessment</td>
<td>&lt; 5 min duration; 35 questions; Free; Pictorial version available; 4-16 years</td>
<td>High sensitivity (80-95%); Low specificity (68-100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scales</td>
<td>10 min. duration; 40-55 questions initial evaluation; 26 question follow-up; Free</td>
<td>Initial evaluation and follow-up; Age 6-12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Strong recommendation, low quality evidence (6-21,34)

Screening Tools Efficacy
Consider using a tool when screening and diagnosing ADHD. While a thorough clinical evaluation is the gold standard, screening and diagnostic tools can help determine the severity or presence of comorbid conditions. – Consensus recommendation

Referral to Specialist Care
A primary care physician should consider referring to a specialist based on their clinical judgment and when the presence of a significant comorbidity or an elevated level of complexity is indicated. – Strong recommendation, low quality evidence (22-28)

Screening for Comorbidities
For all adolescents 11 years and older, screen for depression using a tool recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics complemented by the Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scale. For patients younger than 11 years, screen with the Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scale and complement with an age-appropriate depression screening from the list below if the provider has concerns.

Refer to the following tools to screen for depression:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHQ (Patient Health Questionnaire) – 2</td>
<td>1 min duration; Free Overall (for depression): Sensitivity: 83% to 87% Specificity: 78% to 92% PPV: not available</td>
<td>Non-English version not validated; Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHQ (Patient Health Questionnaire) – 9</td>
<td>&lt;5 min duration; Free Excellent internal reliability and test-retest reliability. Cutoff score of 10 or more:</td>
<td>Non-English version not validated; Adult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Condition-Specific Elements of Clinical Management

#### General:
In addition to routine care,
- Use a recommended rating scale or tool during the screening and diagnosis process
- Use a recommended tool to screen for comorbidities
- Refer to a specialty care provider based on clinical judgment or when the presence of a significant comorbidity or an elevated level of complexity is indicated

#### Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Percentage of patients whose evaluation includes a screening tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased diagnostic accuracy of ADHD and comorbidities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timely referral to specialty care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Screen for anxiety using the SCARED (Self-Report for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders) tool or an alternative based on patient’s symptomatology. The efficacy of anxiety screening tools was limited in the primary care provider setting; escalate patients to specialty care provider for further testing as necessary. – Strong recommendation, low quality evidence (29-33)**

**Patients should be screened for additional comorbidities by their primary care physician. – Consensus recommendation**
**TCH Evidence-Based Outcomes Center**

**Clinical Algorithm for the Screening and Diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

1. **Primary care appointment with concern for ADHD**
2. **Comprehensive assessment of patient history, symptoms, and developmental level**

   - Is patient <6 years old?
     - Yes: Consider referral to specialty care for further evaluation to confirm diagnosis
     - No: Screen patient using the *Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scales* with the follow-up assessment; consider providing one for each of the following:
       - Parent/Guardian
       - Teacher (if during the school year)

3. **Does the patient have **significant comorbidities based on clinical evaluation?**
   - No: Continue treatment as prescribed
   - Yes: **Symptomatic for >6 months**
     - Symptoms evident prior to 12 years old in at least 2 environments (e.g. home and school)
     - **Developmental history and positive Vanderbilt screening result?**
       - Yes: Confirm ADHD diagnosis and treat accordingly
       - No: OFF Algorithm

4. **Is the patient ≥12 years old?**
   - Yes: Child
     - If concerned, screen for depression with:
       - PSC-Y
       - PSC-35
       - CES-DC
     - Confirm ADHD diagnosis and/or comorbidities diagnoses and treat accordingly
     - Poor response within the first 2 months of treatment?
       - Yes: Consider referral to Specialty Care Provider for further treatment
       - No: Continue treatment as prescribed
   - No: Adolescent
     - Screen for depression with one of the following:
       - PHQ-2
       - PHQ-9
       - GAP'S
       - CES-DC
     - Poor response within the first 2 months of treatment?
       - Yes: Consider referral to Specialty Care Provider for further treatment
       - No: Continue treatment as prescribed

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**Notes:**
- *The Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scale is only validated for patients ages 6-12 years. However, it may also be used for patients 12 years and older. These scales should NOT be used alone to make any diagnosis. One must take into consideration information from multiple sources.*
- **Significant Comorbidities**: condition that would adversely affect or be affected by the standard treatment of ADHD
- **Significant comorbidities** is not specific to the comorbidities listed in the Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scale. Other known comorbidities may warrant referral to the school and/or specialty care for further evaluation.
- Screen for anxiety using the SCARED (Self-Report for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders) tool or an alternative based on patient’s symptomatology.
- **Symptomatic for >6 months**
- Symptoms evident prior to 12 years old in at least 2 environments (e.g. home and school)
- **Significant Comorbidities**: condition that would adversely affect or be affected by the standard treatment of ADHD
- **Significant comorbidities** is not specific to the comorbidities listed in the Vanderbilt Diagnostic Rating Scale. Other known comorbidities may warrant referral to the school and/or specialty care for further evaluation.
- Screen for anxiety using the SCARED (Self-Report for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders) tool or an alternative based on patient’s symptomatology.

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References


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This clinical standard was prepared by the Evidence-Based Outcomes Center (EBOC) team in collaboration with content experts at Texas Children’s Hospital. Development of this clinical standard supports the TCH Quality and Patient Safety Program initiative to promote clinical standards and outcomes that build a culture of quality and safety within the organization.

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No relevant financial or intellectual conflicts to report.

Development Process
This clinical standard was developed using the process outlined in the EBOC Manual. The literature appraisal documents the following steps:

1. Review Preparation
   - PICO questions established
   - Evidence search confirmed with content experts

2. Review of Existing External Guidelines
   - None

3. Literature Review of Relevant Evidence
   - Searched: EBSCO, PubMed, CINAHL

4. Critically Analyze the Evidence
   - 15 non-randomized studies

5. Summarize the Evidence
   - Materials used in the development of the clinical standard, literature appraisal, and any order sets are maintained in a Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) evidence-based review manual within EBOC.

Evaluating the Quality of the Evidence
Published clinical guidelines were evaluated for this review using the AGREE II criteria. The summary of these guidelines are included in the literature appraisal. AGREE II criteria evaluate Guideline Scope and Purpose, Stakeholder Involvement, Rigor of Development, Clarity and Presentation, Applicability, and Editorial Independence using a 4-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more comprehensive the guideline.

Recommending the Evidence
This clinical standard specifically summarizes the evidence in support of or against specific interventions and identifies where evidence is lacking/inconclusive. The following categories describe how research findings provide support for treatment interventions.
- “Evidence Supports” provides evidence to support an intervention.
- “Evidence Against” provides evidence against an intervention.
- “Evidence Lacking/Inconclusive” indicates there is insufficient evidence to support or refute an intervention and no conclusion can be drawn from the evidence.

The GRADE criteria were utilized to evaluate the body of evidence used to make practice recommendations. The table below defines how the quality of the evidence is rated and how a strong versus weak recommendation is established. The literature appraisal reflects the critical points of evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Type of Evidence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Consistent evidence from well-performed RCTs or exceptionally strong evidence from unbiased observational studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEAK</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Evidence from RCTs with important limitations (e.g., inconsistent results, methodological flaws, indirect evidence, or imprecise results) or unusually strong evidence from unbiased observational studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Evidence for at least 1 critical outcome from observational studies, RCTs with serious flaws or indirect evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Evidence for at least 1 critical outcome from unystematic clinical observations or very indirect evidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations
Practice recommendations were directed by the existing evidence and consensus amongst the content experts. Patient and family preferences were included when possible. The Content Expert Team and EBOC team remain aware of the controversies in the diagnosis/management of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children. When evidence is lacking, options in care are provided in the clinical standard and the accompanying order sets (if applicable).

Approval Process
Clinical standards are reviewed and approved by hospital committees as deemed appropriate for its intended use. Clinical standards are reviewed as necessary within EBOC at Texas Children’s Hospital. Content Expert Teams are involved with every review and update.

Disclaimer
Practice recommendations are based upon the evidence available at the time the clinical standard was developed. Clinical standards (guidelines, summaries, or pathways) do not set out the standard of care and are not intended to be used to dictate a course of care. Each physician/practitioner must use his or her independent judgment in the management of any specific patient and is responsible, in consultation with the patient and/or the patient’s family, to make the ultimate judgment regarding care.

Version History
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2015</td>
<td>Originally completed</td>
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