

## SIGNS OF PUBERTY

Puberty is the process the body goes through to become capable of making a baby (reproduction), as well as reach adult size and brain development. Puberty starts when your brain tells your pituitary gland to start releasing puberty-related hormones. This happens at different ages for different people. For people assigned female at birth, this can happen between 8-13 years of age; for people assigned male at birth, this can happen between 9-14 years of age.

During this time, your body starts to increase the amount of certain puberty-related hormones: luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). These cause the ovaries to start producing estrogen or the testicles to start producing testosterone, and then your body starts to change.

### PUBERTAL BODY CHANGES IN PEOPLE ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH:

- Increase in chest/breast and nipple size
- Changes in body shape, including fuller hips
- Rapid growth in height (growth spurt)
- Menstrual period starts (usually more than 2 years after chest/breast changes begin)

### PUBERTAL BODY CHANGES IN PEOPLE ASSIGNED MALE AT BIRTH:

- Testicle growth
- The scrotum become thinner and wrinkly
- Penis growth
- Facial and body hair
- Rapid growth in height (growth spurt)
- Voice changes (deepens)

### HOW DO I KNOW WHEN IT'S THE RIGHT TIME TO START PUBERTY BLOCKING MEDICATION?

Puberty blocking medication cannot be started until puberty begins. You can watch for puberty at home:

For people **assigned female at birth**, watch for changes in the chest/breast size. This can feel like a pea-sized mound behind the nipple; it can be on only one or both sides at the same time.

For people **assigned male at birth**, watch for an increase in the size of the genitals, especially an increase in the size of the testicles and scrotum.

Other signs of puberty may start *before* an increase in the chest/breast or testicular size, such as body odor and leg and/or armpit hair. While this is an indication that changes associated with puberty are starting, these are not the signs of puberty that indicate it's time to start puberty blocking medication.

In addition to monitoring at home, The Gender Clinic recommends visiting your family doctor, nurse practitioner, or pediatrician every 6 months to monitor for the onset of puberty. There are two ways for your doctor to check for puberty:

1. A physical exam: depending on your body parts, the doctor or nurse practitioner will have a very quick look at your chest (for people assigned female at birth) or your testicles (for people assigned male at birth). This is called a Tanner Staging Exam.
2. A blood test: your family doctor, nurse practitioner, or pediatrician can test the puberty-related hormones in the blood (LH, FSH, and estrogen or testosterone). This blood test needs to be done in the morning.

**Once signs of puberty are noted — either through monitoring at home or by monitoring done by your family doctor, nurse practitioner, or pediatrician, please reach out to the Gender Clinic to let us know.**

Remember that puberty happens over a long period of time. The exact timing of starting puberty-blocking medication after puberty has started will be discussed with the gender doctor. Please reach out to the Gender Clinic (number and email above) if you have questions.