



## SPORTS PHYSICALS



# Marketing to Local Schools

■ TIM REYNOLDS, MD

Offering preparticipation physicals to student athletes is a win-win proposition. It can be lucrative. It renders an important service. And because of the exalted place of school sports in American society, ensuring that young athletes are healthy enough to participate spotlights your urgent care in your community and makes people aware of the many other services you offer.

The key to profitability is effective marketing. Area school children who participate in sports are required to take and pass a preparticipation physical once a year. For urgent cares, pediatricians, and family doctors seeking ancillary revenue, this is low-hanging fruit. So how do you market your center to ensure that it is you providing physicals to the majority of student athletes in your area?

### Take Advantage of Local Media

The start of any athletic season is a golden opportunity to promote your urgent care to local newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations by sending out a press release. This simple one- or two-page document should offer compelling details about the importance of sports physicals for student athletes. A Google search using the phrase “how to write a press release” will turn up a wealth of tips.

Last April, for example, a study published in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation* found that basketball had the highest risk of sudden cardiac death, followed by swimming, lacrosse, football, and cross-country track. Many of these deaths could possibly have been prevented by a preparticipation screening that assessed cardiovascular risk. Such information is readily available online.



**Tim Reynolds** is the president of HealthCARE Express (<http://healthcareexpress.us>), a chain of urgent care centers headquartered in Texarkana, Texas, and publisher of *UrgentCareManagementMonthly.com*, a free online publication for urgent care owners and managers. He can be reached at [TReynoldsMD@urgencaremanagementmonthly.com](mailto:TReynoldsMD@urgencaremanagementmonthly.com).

*“Techniques for marketing preparticipation physicals are linked by a common theme: know your customer.”*

With all that is happening in the world, why would local media outlets want to publish articles, conduct radio interviews, or air TV segments on such a mundane topic as sports physicals? Because all these outlets have a large news hole to fill every day, and they will consider *any* news that might help them fill it, particularly the most attention-getting news of all: local news.

When news that affects a multitude of families in your area is timed to coincide with a predictable current event, like the start of basketball practice in the fall, it has a good chance of being covered, particularly if a savvy urgent care draws attention to it. When that news concerns a health risk to children, and the messenger is someone credible, like a physician, coverage prospects soar.

While most parents know their children are required to have physicals to participate on a school athletic team, many do not understand why a sports physical is mandatory. Informing them is news.

In addition to covering the risks involved in playing sports, your press release should explain how a doctor taking a good medical history prior to a student taking the field can prevent serious injuries and accidents from occurring. Be sure your press release includes the convenient hours when preparticipation physicals are conducted at your center.

Also wise is to purchase airtime on a local cable channel and run a TV commercial to promote sports physicals at your clinic. Using local athletes will better target your commercial to local viewers. In addition, providing a digital copy of the commercial for student athletes to share on their social media networks can spark a viral marketing campaign that quickly saturates your region with the news.

Once you have a commercial, you can also purchase airtime at local movie theaters. Many theaters air the commercials of local advertisers prior to the film for a modest fee. The commercials typically rotate in a repeating cycle. A packed theater waiting for the movie to begin is a captive audience that may view your commercial a dozen or more times before the lights dim.

### **Gain Attention With Social Media**

You Tube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)), Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), and Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) are no-cost conduits for sharing information on sports physicals online with a select group of people who have opted in to receive your messages. If you find social media bewildering, consult with your younger staffers, or your own children, for whom tweets and Facebook postings are as natural as breathing.

If your urgent care already has a You Tube “channel” (that is, a homepage for your account), recruit a staff provider to star in a weekly 10-to-15-minute video on preventing sports injuries to post on the site. Because sports seasons come and go throughout the year, the topics your provider chooses to discuss can be fairly diverse and tailored to different sports, including:

- The importance of pre-season conditioning
- Altering a training regimen gradually and safely
- Proper warm-up techniques to prevent injury
- Why equipment in good condition is essential for safety

At the end of the video, take a moment to promote your center’s ability to handle both preparticipation physicals and sports injuries. In addition to posting the video on YouTube, you can also post it on Facebook, Tweet about it on Twitter, upload it to your website, and add it to your center’s blog. Filming should take you (or the staffer you delegate it to) about an hour a week. An entire year’s worth of video topics can be shot in about a day and then scheduled to run throughout the year.

### **Offer Free Physicals at School**

Because preparticipation physicals are required before players can start practicing with the team, many coaches prefer them to be conducted at school en masse on one convenient day. Contact high school athletic directors in your area to see how your providers can be part of such a program. This may mean volunteering your services, but it is really a barter arrangement. In exchange for donating your time and expertise, request that prospective team members who miss their free physicals be referred to your clinic for a make-up physical at your standard rate.

Giving freebies may seem heretical, but do not be shortsighted. This is an opportunity to forge relationships with local athletic trainers and coaches. Sports injuries occur year-round. Coaches are more inclined to send an injured player to an urgent care with which they have a relationship.

In addition, going back to school for a day gives you the opportunity to interact with hundreds of area school kids and their parents for only the cost of your time. Be sure you bring plenty of brochures on your clinic’s services to send home with each student following the physical exam.

### **Become a Team Sponsor**

An easy and exciting way to market preparticipation physicals is by sponsoring a junior or senior high school athletic team. These days, many schools face budget shortfalls and must trim their athletic program expenses. This presents a great marketing opportunity for your urgent care.

School athletic directors are continually looking for ways to partner with area businesses to provide new uniforms, equipment, hydration stations, digital scoreboards, and even mentorships for players who may be struggling academically. Sponsorships are not charity; they should provide a mutual benefit to the team you are sponsoring and to you. In exchange for a donation, request that your center’s logo be affixed to the item or items you fund. Request that team announcers mention your center as a sponsor during season games or meets. In exchange for a sizable donation, request that your center be the school’s primary referral source for sports physicals and injuries. That is money well spent.

If your budget is limited, more modest sponsorships are available through a local athletic booster club. Booster clubs provide support and encouragement to coaches and student athletes to promote school spirit and athletic excellence and encourage good sportsmanship. Through a booster club, you can place ads in game programs distributed at an event, sponsor team banners, and even host fan appreciation nights. For the latter, you would typically provide free noisemakers, sports balls, water bottles, or other sports-related items to team fans. For maximum effectiveness, such promotional items should sport team colors and feature both the team logo and your clinic logo. On game day, members of your staff should be at the playing field, court, track, or pool to distribute the items before play begins.

### **A Common Theme**

These techniques for marketing preparticipation physicals are linked by a common theme: know your customer. Traditional media may give your urgent care exposure money can’t buy if you meet their need for news. Student athletes can make your cause their own if you give them an opportunity to star in your commercial and then give them a copy to share with their friends. School coaches and athletic directors will send business your way if you take time to establish a good relationship with them. Spending a relatively modest sum to sponsor a school team is a community service that members of the community are not likely to forget as long as athletic competition remains integral to American life. ■