



Developmental Delay Testing Criteria for Children's Therapy Services (Birth–Age 20)

The March 2026 update of the [Texas Medicaid Provider Procedures Manual](#) Vol. 2: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech Therapy Services Handbook (Section 5.3) includes important reminders about testing for developmental delay criteria in children from birth through 20 years of age.

To establish a developmental delay, the following criteria must be met:

- Tests used must be norm-referenced, standardized, and specific to the therapy provided.
- Retesting with norm-referenced standardized test tools for re-evaluations must occur every 180 days. Tests must be age appropriate for the child being tested, and providers must use the same testing instrument used in the initial evaluation.

If reuse of the initial testing instrument is not appropriate (i.e., due to change in client status or restricted age range of the testing tool), provider should explain the reason for the change.

- Eligibility for therapy will be based upon a score that falls 1.5 standard deviations (SD) or more below the mean in at least one subtest area of composite score on a norm-referenced, standardized test. Raw scores must be reported along with score reflecting SD from the mean.
- When the client's test score is less than 1.5 SD below the mean, a criterion-referenced test along with informed evidenced-based clinical opinion must be included to support the medical necessity of services and will be sent to physician review to determine medical necessity.
- If a child cannot complete norm-referenced standardized assessments, then a functional description of the child's abilities and deficits must be included. Measurable functional short- and long-term goals will be considered along with test results. Documentation of the reason a standardized test could not be used must be included in the evaluation.

If the client's test score is less than 1.5 SD below the mean, additional documentation supporting the client's medical

need for therapy will be considered and the request will be sent to physician review to determine medical necessity.

Additional speech therapy visits or sessions may be considered for moderate speech language, articulation, voice and dysphagia developmental delays when documentation submitted supports medical necessity as delineated in the frequency criteria in this handbook.

Specific developmental delay criteria requirements for speech diagnoses are as follows:

LANGUAGE: At least one norm-referenced, standardized test with good reliability and validity, a score that falls 1.5 SD or more below the mean, and clinical documentation of an informal assessment that supports the delay.

ARTICULATION: At least one norm-referenced, standardized test with good reliability and validity, a score that falls 1.5 SD or more below the mean, and clinical documentation of an informal assessment that supports the delay.

APRAXIA: At least one norm-referenced, standardized test with good reliability and validity, a score that falls 1.5 SD or more below the mean, and clinical documentation of an informal assessment that supports the delay.

FLUENCY: At least one norm-referenced, standardized test with good reliability, a score that falls 1.5 SD or more below the mean, and clinical documentation of an informal assessment that supports the delay.

VOICE: A medical evaluation is required for eligibility and based on medical referral.

ORAL MOTOR/SWALLOWING/FEEDING: An in-depth, functional profile of oral motor structures and function.

Example

Jayden is a 5-year-old member with difficulty speaking. His mother seeks an evaluation for speech therapy. As part of the evaluation, the speech therapist administers a standardized test for language skills. His test score for expression is at least 1.5 standard deviations (SD) below the mean (average) for his age. His test score for reception is 1 SD below the mean. The provider requests a prior authorization for therapy once a week over 180 days to work on expression. The authorization is approved.

A month before his current therapy is about to end, the provider completes a re-evaluation. The member just had a birthday and is now 6 years old. In the report, the therapist notes she used a different test because the previous test is only valid up to 5 years and 11 months. The new evaluation shows that Jayden's skills for speaking and understanding are now both within 1.5 SD of the mean for his age. He is ready to transition out of skilled therapy.