Today’s piece was prepared by Amy Downing, MD based on an October 19, 2012 *Seattle Times* article, “Earlier puberty seen in boys, just like in girls:” <http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2019477132_earlypuberty20.html>

The article reports on a recent study published in Pediatrics investigating trends in age of puberty onset in American boys. Data was collected on 4131 boys ages 6-16 by 212 practitioners across the country. Children with chronic conditions or medications that can affect puberty were excluded. The authors found that the mean ages of onset for Tanner 2 genital development were about 10 years old for non-Hispanic white and Hispanic boys, and about 9 years old for African American boys. Stage 2 pubic hair development occurred approximately 1 year later. African American boys showed statistically significant earlier Tanner 2 genital and pubic hair development than white and Hispanic boys. The authors concluded that the observed mean ages of beginning genital and pubic hair development in their study were 6 months to 2 years earlier than in past studies.

The Seattle Times summarizes this data well, without going into detail on statistical analysis or inclusion/exclusion criteria. The author points out design limitations related by the researcher, including inability to compare data to prior studies, and that several specialists explain that one research study does not definitively prove a changing age of puberty.

The article mentions several theories to explain why a change may be occurring, including higher obesity rates or chemicals in food or water, without clarifying what is meant by “theory” (i.e., a valid scientific theory based on examination of evidence vs. a more colloquial sense meaning speculation based on belief or sentiment). In addition, the opinions of several physicians are shared, but the journalist does not follow journalistic custom to specify whether these physicians were involved in the study and who could, therefore, have a conflict of interest. The reader is susceptible to believing that the Seattle Times article must present scientifically scrutinized medical data, despite the reality of very different standards and absence of the peer review process in popular journalism.

The following resources on puberty for parents and adolescents are helpful:

**RESOURCES ON PUBERTY**

“Going from Tween to Teen” : a guidebook from the WA state DOH

<http://here.doh.wa.gov/materials/tween-2-teen/13_CSHCN-12yr_E11L.pdf>

The “What’s Happening to my Body” Book for Boys by Lynda Madaras: written by an experienced educator, includes honest, non-judgemental discussions on the changing body, health, sexual education, and more.

Resources For Parents:

“Puberty 101 for Parents: a brief overview of discussion topics put together by Planned Parenthood

Teenology 101: a parent-friendly blog written by one of Seattle Children’s excellent adolescent physicians

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!