

Shriners Children's Chicago Highlighting Unique Treatment Method for Kids with Severe Scoliosis

Nonprofit healthcare care system utilizing halo-gravity traction to gently straighten spine

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, March 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As people begin making their spring and summer vacation plans, Shriners Children's Chicago is reminding families to evaluate their child's spine for signs of scoliosis, a sideways "s" curve that may be more visible when

children are wearing summer season clothes and swimsuits. If a child's pediatrician or family medicine doctor believes the curve requires specialized evaluation, Shriners Children's Chicago is raising awareness about their team of pediatric orthopedic spine surgeons and specialists who are there to help. Shriners Children's provides a unique and life-changing treatment option for



Three Shriners Children's Chicago patients "in halo" for severe scoliosis treatment playing together.

children with severe scoliosis which can help ensure the effectiveness of spinal fusion surgery. It's a classic technique with real benefits, but many hospitals may not offer it due to insurance constraints.

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*Michal Szczodry, M.D.,
Shriners Children's Chicago
pediatric spine surgeon*

Halo-gravity traction (HGT) is a treatment for spine deformities that involves gently stretching and straightening the spine. The treatment is done by attaching a metal ring that surrounds the head – called a halo – to a pulley system. Michal Szczodry, M.D., a pediatric spine surgeon at Shriners Children's Chicago, has helped treat hundreds of patients by utilizing halo traction. Dr. Szczodry said children who have a curvature measuring 90 to 180 degrees are considered to have a very severe case of

scoliosis, which can limit a child's ability to participate in sports, lead to physical discomfort in daily activities and sometimes affect their ability to breathe normally.

“This technique has been around for quite a while, but a lot of medical facilities stopped offering it years ago because of the challenges involved with the length of time children needed to be ‘in halo’ as we call it and insurance wouldn’t always cover that cost,” Dr. Szczodry said. “Thankfully at Shriners Children’s, we’re able to provide these kinds of treatments regardless of families’ ability to pay or whether insurance will cover it. Our halo kids typically end up spending anywhere from three to eight weeks in our hospital, so they get to know our staff really well and we try to make their time in our institution, including during the spring and summer months when their friends might be out playing, very special.”

Children, such as 7 year old Simone, who have halo traction will receive physical, occupational and recreational therapy while they are in care and participate in fun activities during their stay in the hospital’s Ballreich Patient Activity Mall and extensive backyard. Simone has formed a special bond with her hospital schoolteacher, provided through Chicago Public Schools. They two share actual puppet friends who join in lessons, and we hear Simone is about to add a puppet dog to her hospital ‘family’.

As other institutions begin to offer this treatment for 1-2 patients, Shriners Children’s Chicago, and other Shriners Children’s locations, are some of only a handful of places in the country that has long offered halo treatment and allows children to stay in the hospital throughout the entire multi-week treatment process. After halo traction, children usually have spinal fusion surgery to permanently straighten the spine. Dr. Szczodry said the halo-first approach reduces intraoperative risk of damaging the spinal cord and nerves, as well as soft tissues that surround and support the spine.

“I have witnessed incredible transformations with halo traction,” said Dr. Szczodry. “Kids who arrive with severe, stuck-out spinal curves see their spines gradually straighten and actually feel it straightening in the process. Although the setup can look uncomfortable, our patients typically like the feeling of being stretched and the feeling that comes with it. This treatment is life-changing for many of our kids and allows them to get back to doing the things they love sooner.”

For more information on this treatment, head to www.shrinerschildrens.org/en/pediatric-care/halo-traction.

About Shriners Children’s

Shriners Children’s improves the lives of children by providing pediatric specialty care, conducting innovative research, and offering outstanding education programs for medical professionals. Children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, and cleft lip and palate are eligible for care, regardless of the families’ ability to pay, and receive all care and services in a compassionate, family-centered environment. For more information, please visit shrinerschildrens.org.

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