

Back to School: A Handy Health & Safety Checklist

It's just about that time again: Time to switch from swimsuits to school clothes and from beach bags to backpacks. That's the easy part. What about preparing your child to have the healthiest and safest school year possible? Here's a handy checklist to help.

1. Schedule medical, eye, and dental checkups. Before school starts, check with the pediatrician to see if your child needs any immunizations. Vision and hearing tests are also a good idea, although schools perform hearing tests during certain grades.¹ If your child is playing sports, ask the pediatrician whether a special checkup is needed. With certain sports, concussions can be a serious problem. Talk to the doctor about ways to protect your child.²

2. Organize your child's medical history records. Provide copies to your child's school or daycare providers. I can help you pull some of this together, but the list should include your child's:

- Prescription medications
- Medical problems such as asthma or allergies
- Previous surgeries
- Emergency contacts²

3. Communicate about transportation. Some kids get dropped up and picked up by parents. Others carpool. Still others walk, bike, or take the bus. And, of course, teens may have their own wheels. Regardless, it's important that your kids be—and *feel*—safe getting to and from school.

- If you or another adult picks up your child, agree on a time and place for pickups. Explain what to do if the driver is running late.
- If your child walks or bikes, do a dry run and explain any potential traffic hazards.
- If your child or teen takes the bus, find a safe route and agree on a visible pick-up and drop-off spot. Ideally, this is a place where other kids are around and adults can clearly see them.

- If your teen drives to school, be crystal clear about safe driving—including ditching that teen temptation: texting while driving.

Create an emergency plan in case anything goes awry. In fact, make sure your child knows what to do in an emergency—whether at home or at school or anywhere in between.²

4. Remember that there's more to school than hitting the books. For example, good nutrition and exercise are essential for brain health. Here are a few other reminders:

- Be consistent about bedtime and wake-up times. Growing kids need at least 8 hours of sleep—and teens need even more.¹
- Make homework a habit by having clear routines. But don't overlook free time and friend time.
- Explain ways to prevent infection such as by regularly washing hands and by not sharing hats or other clothing. That's one way lice get around!
- Keep lines of communication open. Listen for signs of bullying or other concerns. Many parents find that car rides are a great time to have nonthreatening conversations with their kids. Contact the school if a problem like bullying does arise.^{3,4}

Now about those school supplies.... Come by the store to stock up. And while you're here, we can talk over your health and safety plans for the school year.

Nothing herein constitutes medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or is a substitute for professional advice. You should always seek the advice of your physician or other medical professional if you have questions or concerns about a medical condition.

Sources

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3. National Association Of School Nurses: Back to School Family Checklist.
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