A HEALTHY START TO SCHOOL

Starting kindergarten is an exciting time.
This booklet has information for parents/caregivers to help your child have a healthy start to school.

Has your child:

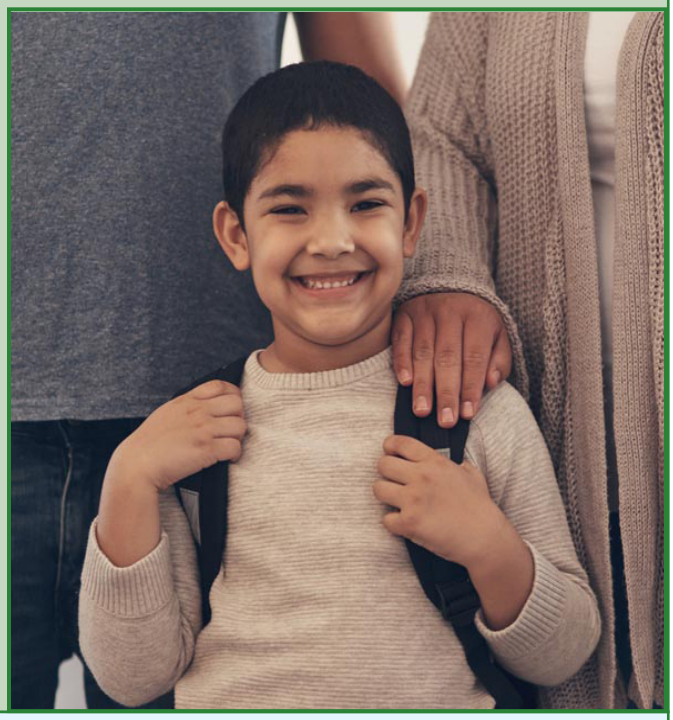
- ❒ had an eye examination?
- ❒ received the vaccines needed to attend school?

Note: Parent must also report vaccines to Toronto Public Health

How to help your child do well at school

Children learn best when:

- They have a routine at home. When children know what activity comes next they feel safer and less worried.
- They have enough sleep, healthy foods and physical activity.
- They feel safe in their school.
- Their parents/caregivers are involved in their learning and their school.



Most parents and caregivers have questions about parenting and what to expect when their children start school. There are many people in the school who can help. Speak with the teachers, principals, guidance counsellors and social workers.

For newcomers to Canada, there are settlement workers in certain schools to provide additional help.

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How to help your child have a healthy start to school

Reduce the spread of respiratory viruses

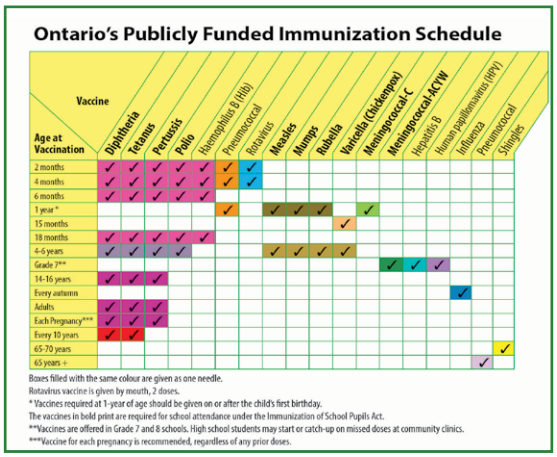
Everyone has a role to play to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses.

- Getting vaccinated in addition to using other layers of protection will help protect you, your loved ones and those most vulnerable in our community.
- Stay home and away from others if you are sick and keep your children home if they are sick.
- Consider wearing a well-fitting, high-quality mask, in crowded indoor public settings with poor ventilation, especially if you or people around you are at higher risk of getting very sick. Masks should not be worn by children under the age of two and people who have trouble breathing or who cannot remove the mask without help.

- Wash or sanitize your hands often.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue.
- Regularly clean and disinfect high touch surfaces.
- Choose well-ventilated areas when possible.
- Stay up-to-date with COVID-19 and flu vaccines, when eligible, for the best protection against getting very sick.

Immunization

Vaccines protect children from serious diseases. Ontario's Immunization of School Pupils Act



(ISPA) requires all school-age children to be vaccinated against nine designated diseases or provide a valid exemption. All the vaccines needed for school are free.

Every time your child gets a vaccination, report it Toronto Public Health at toronto.ca/studentvaccines. Your health care provider does not send the information to Toronto Public Health. It is the parent's responsibility.

Children and stress

Just like adults, children can feel anxious or stressed about new situations, meeting new people, and they can worry about many things.

Stress in your child may show up in different ways including:

- Headaches or tummy aches.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Eating more or eating less.
- Not wanting to go to school.
- Changes in their behaviour (e.g. more quiet/more active than usual).
- Looking sad or worried.
- Showing no interest in things they used to enjoy.

You can help your child if they feel stressed by:

- Getting your child familiar with the school and school grounds before starting school.
- Spending time and doing things together.
- Paying full attention when your child talks.
- Talking/ providing support about any of their worries/fears.

- Showing your child that you love them.
- Giving your child time to relax from a busy schedule.
- Watching your child play and helping them to get along with other children.
- Helping them learn to solve simple problems.

Sleep and kids

Children need sleep to be healthy and happy and do their best. Children ages 3 and 4 require 10 to 13 hours of good quality sleep each night. Children ages 5 to 13 years require 9 to 11 hours of sleep each night.

- Create a bedtime routine with your child (e.g. have a bath or read a book together).
- Keep your child's bedtime about the same time during the week and on weekends.
- Limit screen time before bed.
- Keep screens (TVs, video games, tablets and computers) out of your child's bedroom because the light and sounds from screens prevent children from sleeping.
- Make sure the sleep area is cool, dark and quiet.
- Encourage your child to be physically active during the day.
- Avoid giving your child drinks with caffeine (e.g. colas, chocolate, tea, coffee).

Be active

Regular physical activity can help children have increased concentration, better academic scores, improved self-esteem, healthy growth and development, stronger heart and bones and healthier muscles.

Encourage your child to move! It is important for children 3 to 4 years old to be active for at least 180 minutes each day in a variety of physical activities, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play like running, dancing and jumping. Children 5–17 years of age need to be active for an accumulation of at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity involving a variety of aerobic activities. Encourage everyone in the family to be active together. Reduce the "non-active" (sedentary behaviour) time children spend on computers, electronic games, or watching TV to less than one hour per day for 3 to 4 year olds and less than two hours a day for 5 to 17 year olds. Less is better.

Healthy eater, healthy learner

Children need nutritious food to give them energy so they can learn better in school.

- Use Canada's Food Guide to plan meals and snacks that include a variety of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods.
- Start the day with a nutritious breakfast- it can be simple and quick! See Balanced Breakfast for Kids – Unlock Food for ideas.

- Involve your children in planning and preparing lunches and snacks.
- Encourage your child to drink water throughout the day.
- Avoid calling foods "good" or "bad" to help kids develop a positive relationship with food.
- Find local food and nutrition services in your community at 211.

Healthy teeth

Healthy teeth are important for eating, talking, socializing and learning.

- Give your child foods that help with dental health such as milk, cheese, and a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The best drink to quench thirst is water.

- Help your child floss and brush their teeth before bedtime.
- Call Toronto Public Health's Dental and Oral Health Services at 416-338-6565 to get more information about healthy teeth and free dental care.

Speech and language

Speech and language skills are important for your child's success in school.

By age four, a child should be able to:

- Follow directions involving three or more steps.
- Use adult type grammar.
- Tell stories with a beginning, middle and end.
- Talk to try and solve problems with adults and with other children.
- Show increasingly complex imaginary play.
- Talk in a way that is understood by strangers allmost all the time.
- Generate simple rhymes (cat-bat).
- Match some letters with their sounds (letter b says "buh").

Your child's hearing impacts their speech and spoken language development.

Have your child's hearing checked by an audiologist if:

- Your child is not meeting communication milestones, or
- You are worried about your child's hearing.

You can help your child get ready for school by reading books together every day. Point out letters and words on the page and talk about the pictures. You can also participate in story time programs together at the library.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech, language or social skills, talk to your child's school principal, contact your health care provider or Surrey Place. Learn more about services for school-aged children.

Vision and learning

Vision health is important for your child's learning and participation in school activities. In fact, 80% of what children learn is gained through their eyes. It is important for your child to have an eye exam before starting school to check their vision development and to find ways to help if they have any vision challenges.

Kindergarten students can get an OHIP-covered eye exam and a free pair of eyeglasses, if needed, through the Eye See Eye Learn Program. OHIP covers an eye exam by an optometrist every year for children under the age of 20.

Dressing for the weather

Outdoor play supports children's health and well-being. Spend time outside and enjoy the changing seasons and temperatures safely.

Very hot weather can pose health risks. To reduce the risk of skin damage such as sunburn, and to prevent sunstroke or heat exhaustion in the summer:

- Limit time spent in the sun between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- Stay in the shade when outdoors.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat to shade the face and neck.
- Wear loose, breathable clothing.
- Thirty minutes before sun exposure, apply broad spectrum sunscreen, SPF 30 or higher. Reapply every 2 hours and after swimming or sweating.
- Wear UVA and UVB protective sunglasses if possible.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Children may not feel thirsty while at play.

Extreme cold weather and snow and ice can be unsafe for children. Follow these tips to keep your child warm, dry and healthy during colder weather:

- Dress in layers and cover exposed skin.
- Wear waterproof and windproof outer layers.
- Wear a hat and keep ears covered at all times.
- Wear mittens instead of gloves as they are warmer.
- Wear warm, waterproof boots with deep treads.
- Check regularly if your child is warm and dry.
- Send extra socks and mittens to school in case they get wet.

Safety while playing

Here are some things you can do to help your child to have fun while playing without getting hurt:

- Do a safety check before your children play: check the area for sharp objects and garbage, report any equipment that needs repair, and choose playgrounds with soft surfaces such as sand or rubber.
- Check your child's clothing for any items that may become a hazard such as drawstrings, shoelaces, scarves or necklaces.
- Supervise your child while still giving them the chance to explore. Be extra cautious around roads and water.
- Make sure your child uses playground equipment and toys intended for their age and ability.
- Be a role model for safe play.

Right helmet for each sport

Wearing a correct, properly fitted helmet may help protect your child's brain from serious injury during a crash or a fall. Different sports need different helmets. Use the 2-V-1 Rule to properly fit your helmet:

"2"

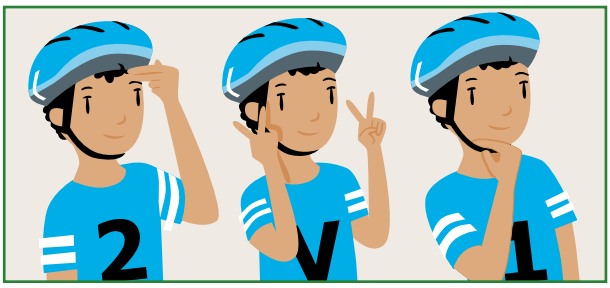
- Put the helmet level on the head, not tilting backward or forward.
- Helmet should cover the top of the head and sit 2 finger-widths above your eyebrows.
- Adjust the fit of the helmet by adding or repositioning the foam pad.
- Move the dial or other fitting devices so it fits snug.

"V"

- The side straps should meet to form a V below each ear.
- If the helmet tilts back, tighten the front straps. If the helmet tilts forward, tighten the back straps.

"1"

- Only 1 finger should fit between the chin and the fastened straps.



Check the helmet fit every time. Bike helmets should be replaced after five years or if a cyclist has hit their head. Children should use additional protective gear such as wrist guards, elbow and knee pads for some activities including skateboarding and scootering.

Child car seats

Using a child car seat or booster seat correctly helps protect children from serious injury better than seat belts alone. A child's age, weight and height can help determine what type of child car seat is best for them. A secure booster seat is mandatory for children if:

- They are under 8 years of age, or
- They are between 18 kg – 36 kg (between 40 – 80 lbs.), or
- They are under 145 cm (4'9") tall.

Here are a few things you should know when using a booster seat:

- A booster seat is needed to position the seat belt properly over your child's body. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations.
- The lap belt should be positioned low and over the hips (not the stomach).
- The shoulder belt should lay flat and snug across your child's shoulder and middle of the chest, staying clear of the neck and face.
- Make sure your child's head is supported by the top of the booster seat, the vehicle seat or the headrest.
- For children under 13 years old, the safest place to travel is in the back seat.

Kids and traffic

Walking to school can help children become more physically active, learn, improve mood, and reduce stress. By walking to school, you are contributing to reducing pollution and traffic around your school. Role model road safety by walking with your child and teaching them these tips:

- Children 10 years and under should be with an adult or an older child to cross the street.
- If possible, wear bright colours and items that are reflective in low light conditions.
- Avoid crossing mid-block and between parked vehicles. Use crosswalks, crossovers, and intersections.
- Stop before crossing any roads. Press the "Walk" button (if there is one) and wait for your turn to cross when the way is clear or all vehicles have come to a full stop.
- Obey traffic signals. Walk, don't run, across the road. Pay attention to traffic as you cross.
- Stay alert. Unplug or remove earphone and put away phones. Check in all directions for vehicles. If possible, make eye contact with drivers and cyclists.
- Talk with your child's school about road safety concerns and call 311 for concerns in your neighbourhood.

If driving a child to school, teach them to safely exit the vehicle and be aware of their surroundings.

Dangers of second-hand smoke

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. It is hazardous for everyone, and especially children because their lungs are small and growing. Second-hand smoke can lead to asthma, allergies, ear infections and cancer.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act makes it illegal to smoke or vape:

- In cars or other motor vehicles if anyone inside is age 15 years or younger.
- Anywhere on school grounds (including playgrounds and sports fields).
- In indoor public places and workplaces like community recreational facilities.
- Outdoors in public places like children's playgrounds, publicly owned sports areas and within 20 metres of these places.

Making your home smoke-free is also important for you and your family's health.

- Let any friends, family and other visitors coming into your home know that your home is smoke/vape free and ensure they know to smoke or vape outdoors.
- If you currently smoke and have been thinking about quitting or cutting down, you don't have to do it alone! Contact Smokers Helpline for support and talk to your health care provider.

Head lice

Head lice are tiny insects that can live and breed on your head. They are greyish-brown in colour and their eggs are white. The oval-shaped eggs (nits) stick firmly to hair near the scalp, unlike dandruff which can be blown off.

Having head lice is very common. To help prevent your child from getting head lice you can:

- Discourage head-to-head contact and sharing of hats, scarves, hairbrushes and combs.
- Tie long hair back in braids.

You cannot prevent head lice by using head lice shampoos or products. Use them only if your child has head lice. Be sure to read the directions carefully; using the treatments incorrectly or too often can be harmful.

Bodies, boundaries, and safety

Children need support from trusted adults to make sense of the world around them. Parents are the primary sexual health educators of their children and have a vital role in sharing their own family's values and talking about bodies, boundaries and safety.

- Many children will ask questions about bodies from a place of curiosity and eagerness to learn.

- It is important to give age-appropriate and factual answers to their questions, even if it's not right away.
- Instead of having "one big talk", it is important to use teachable moments with children to discuss these topics throughout the life span.

Learning about bodies, boundaries and safety begins as babies and toddlers, as they learn the correct "dictionary words" for all their body parts, including their genitals.

Teach them:

- They have the right to say no to any touch.
- Touch is never a secret.
- All types of touch can be talked about.
- To tell a parent/guardian or other trusted adult if a touch or behaviour makes them feel uncomfortable or confused.

Books and other resources are a helpful tool to

initiate conversations and to answer children's questions. You don't need to be an expert! You can find books for children and for parents/ caregivers at your local public library.

Getting involved in your child's school

Here are some ways to get involved in your child's school:

- Walking your child to school can help you get to know other parents and children in your community.
- Talk to your child's teacher about your child's strengths and what they need help with.
- If you can, volunteer to do small activities (e.g. reading with students or attending school council meetings) or larger activities at your school (e.g. helping with school trips or fundraising).
- Take time to listen to your child about what they did at school, ask questions, and encourage them (e.g. "I'm proud of how hard you tried").
- Stay connected with what your child is learning at school by reading to them or with them at home.

Parenting information and services

Being a parent is one of the most rewarding jobs you will ever do but it can also be tough at times. We all want to be good parents and caregivers, and raising children is not always easy. Toronto Public Health provides information about common topics related to parenting.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer parenting support to all families with children from birth to six years old. EarlyON Centres are located in schools and the community. Free parenting services and resources are available including drop-in programs and child health workshops. Visiting an EarlyON Centre is a great way to meet other parents, get information and play with your child. Sharing your concerns and experiences with other parents lets you know you are not alone. There may also be virtual services available.

Toronto Public Health provides FREE resources and services related to prenatal and postnatal care, breastfeeding, parenting, dental care, immunization and MORE!