

A Healthy Start to School



Starting kindergarten is an exciting time. Check if your child is ready for school:

- Can your child get dressed or eat without help?
- Can your child be away from you for a few hours?
- Can your child use crayons, scissors or look at books?
- Has your child had an eye examination?
- Has your child received the immunizations needed to attend school?
- Has your child spent time playing with other children?

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 are involved in their learning and their school.**

All parents and caregivers have questions about parenting and their child's school.

There are many people in the school who can help. Speak with the teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, social workers and public health nurses. For newcomers to Canada, in certain schools there are settlement workers to help as well.



Contents

Parenting programs	3	Safety at the playground	5
Healthy food, healthy learner	3	Right helmet for each sport	6
Clean hands	3	Booster seats	6
Hearing and speech	4	Kids and traffic	6
I see, I learn	4	Dangers of second-hand smoke	6
Healthy teeth	4	Being an askable parent	7
Get vaccinated.....	4	Children and stress	7
Sleep and kids.....	5	Head lice	7
Be active	5	Get involved in your child's school.....	8
Dressing for the weather	5		

How to help your child to have a healthy start to school

Parenting programs

Being a parent is one of the most rewarding jobs you will ever do. But it can also be tough at times. All parents need support. Toronto

Public Health offers free parenting programs that talk about what children can do at different ages, understanding your child's feelings and behaviour, guiding your child through common behavioural challenges and handling common stresses of parenting.



Healthy food, healthy learner

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

- Give enough time for your child to eat a healthy breakfast every morning.
- Ask if your child's school has a breakfast, snack or lunch program.
- Provide a variety of foods from the *Canada's Food Guide* every day (the four



food groups are: Vegetables & Fruits, Grain Products, Milk & Alternatives and Meat & Alternatives).

- Choose a variety of snacks every day from one to three of the four food groups. Most children need snacks for energy between meals.
- Healthy lunches should include foods from three to four of the four food groups.

Clean hands

Our hands often carry and spread germs. Washing our hands is the best way to prevent many illnesses and diseases such as cold and flu.

Be a good role model and make sure everyone washes their hands for at least 15 seconds with soap and water:



- After using the washroom;
- After sneezing, coughing, blowing their nose;
- Before eating foods;
- Before touching a cut or open sore;
- After touching garbage;
- When their hands are visibly dirty;
- After playing with animals;

Hearing and speech

How to tell if your child maybe having difficulty hearing? Does your child:



- Have recurrent ear infections?
- Show preference for one ear (e.g. speaks on the phone using a specific ear?)
- Experience difficulty understanding speech with background noise?
- Misinterpret or need you to repeat your message frequently?
- Need to look at your face when you talk to understand you better?
- Appear to be easily distracted when compared to other children?

If you have concerns, contact your doctor to arrange for a hearing test.

I see, I learn

Your child's vision is very important to your child's learning and school success. Difficulty seeing can make it hard for children to



participate fully and focus on school work. It is important to have your child's vision tested before they come to school. OHIP will cover an eye examination by an optometrist every year for children under 19 years old.

Healthy teeth

Healthy teeth are important for learning and making friends.

- Make sure you brush your child's teeth before bedtime.
- Give your child healthy snacks such as milk, cheese, fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Visit the dentist regularly or call Toronto Public Health if you cannot afford to pay for dental care.



Get vaccinated

Immunization of School Pupils Act is an Ontario law to protect children from vaccine-preventable diseases. As of July 2014, the vaccines required for school attendance are:

- measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (chickenpox)
- diphtheria, tetanus, polio, pertussis (whooping cough) and meningococcal

Chickenpox vaccine only applies to children born on or after January 2010. All vaccines needed for school are free and available at a doctor's office or a medical clinic.

Talk to your doctor to update your child's immunization.

If your child's immunization record is not from Ontario, call Toronto Public Health to find out what vaccines are needed.



Sleep and kids

Children need sleep to keep them healthy, happy and doing their best. Children between 5 to 12 years old require 10–11 hours of sleep each night.

- Have a bedtime routine – do the same relaxing things every night e.g. have a bath and read books together.



- Try to put your child to bed at the same time every night.
- Make sure the bedroom is cool, dark and quiet.
- Encourage your child to be physically active during the day.

- Avoid giving your child

drinks with caffeine in the afternoon or evening.

- Limit screen time before bed and avoid using a computer or watching TV while in bed.

Be active

It is important for children to be active for at least 60 minutes every day.

Children need to be physically active by

running, jumping, throwing, catching and kicking to make them physically stronger and to learn motor skills.

Regular physical activity strengthens bones, builds muscle, works the heart and contributes to a healthy body weight and lifestyle.

Physical activity also helps children to express themselves, to learn social skills, deal with stress, and do better in school.

Reduce the “non-active” time children spend on computers, electronic games, or watching TV to less than 2 hours a day. Encourage everyone in the family to become physically active – active parents will usually have active children.



Dressing for the weather

The hot summer sun can be dangerous for children. To reduce the risk of getting skin cancer and to prevent sunstroke or heat exhaustion in the summer:

- Limit time spent in the sun between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.;
- Look for shade when outdoors;
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade the face and neck;
- Wear loose fitting, tightly woven clothing to cover exposed skin;
- Wear UVA and UVB protective sunglasses;
- Before sun exposure, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen, SPF 15 or higher (SPF 30 or higher when outside for a longer time). Reapply every 2 hours or after swimming or sweating;

The cold winter weather and the snow and ice can be unsafe for children.

- Dress your child in 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.
- Use a neck warmer instead of a scarf.
- Check regularly if your child is warm and dry.
- Wear UVA and UVB protective sunglasses, and apply sunscreen to exposed skin even on cloudy days.

Safety at the playground

Children 5 to 9 years old are injured more frequently in a playground than at any other age. Here are things you can do to help your child to have fun without getting hurt.

- Remove helmet, drawstring, cord or anything else from your child’s clothing that can get tangled on playground equipment.
- Always tie up shoelaces and remove or tuck in scarves.
- Walk around the playground and look for things or equipment that can be dangerous.
- Stay close to your child and watch them carefully.

Right helmet for each sport

Head injuries are the number one cause of serious injury and death to children using equipment with wheels.



Different sports need different helmets (e.g. biking, skateboarding, in-line skating).

Make sure that your child is wearing the helmet the right way every time.

- Leave a space the width of two fingers between the bottom of the helmet and your child's eyebrows.

- Fix the side straps so they fit around your child's ears in a V-shape.
- Tighten the chin strap until you can fit just one finger between the strap and your child's chin.

For in-line skates, skateboards and scooters, children should use additional protective gear (may include wrist guards, elbow or knee pads).

Booster seats

Car crashes are a leading cause of injury-related deaths for children in Canada. A 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 stand less than 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;
- The lap belt should be positioned low across the hips;



- The shoulder belt should lie across the chest and not across the neck;
- For children 12 years old and under, the safest place to travel is in the back seat;

Kids and traffic

Children age 10 and under should be with an adult or someone older when crossing the street. To keep your child safe it is important that you are a good role model.

Here are some safety tips when crossing the road:

- Wear light coloured clothing;
- Only cross at crosswalks or corners with traffic lights or stop signs;
- Obey crossing signals;
- Don't wear headphones or use cell phones;
- Stop, look and listen for traffic;
- Make eye contact with drivers;
- Cross only if the road is clear or traffic has stopped;



Dangers of second-hand smoke



Children's lungs are small and growing; they breathe faster and inhale more second-hand smoke than adults do. Second-hand smoke can lead to asthma, allergies, ear infections and cancer.

The law in Ontario bans smoking in cars with children under 16 years of age.

- Second-hand smoking is even more dangerous inside the small air space of a car.
- Opening the window is not enough – the smoke is blown around to the back seat where children sit.

It is also important to make your home smoke-free.

- If you have to smoke, smoke outside. Ask family members for support.
- Let everyone coming to your home know that you do not want smoking in your home or around your child.

Smoking is banned on all school properties, including playgrounds and parking lots. In Toronto, there is also a by-law that bans smoking within 9 metres of City of Toronto sports fields and park spaces to protect children.

Being an askable parent

Children are curious about bodies. Answering their questions throughout their lives will allow you to keep the lines of communication open as well as share your cultural and family values. Parents are encouraged to think about replacing “the big talk” about the changes of puberty with ongoing and open age-appropriate conversations.

- Whenever your child asks a question, it requires an answer, even if it is not right away.
- It is fine to tell your child you do not know the answer. Tell your child you will find the answer or look it up together.
- Children’s books are a great way to help explain things that you may not know how to answer on your own.
- Teach your child the correct names of all body parts.
- Talk to your child about touch and encourage them to tell you if someone’s touch or behaviour makes them feel uncomfortable.

Children and stress

Just like adults, children can feel anxious or stressed about new situations, meeting new people or having too many things to worry about.

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

- Headaches or tummy aches;
- Trouble sleeping;
- Eating more or less;
- Not wanting to go to school;
- Becoming more quiet;
- Looking sad or worried;



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;
- Showing your child that you love him/her;
- Giving your child time to relax from a busy schedule;
- Watching your child play and helping him/her to get along with other children;



Head lice

Head lice are tiny insects that can live and breed on your child’s 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.

Get involved in your child's school

- Walk your child to school and get to know other parents and children.
- Talk to your child's teacher about your child's strengths and what he/she needs help with.
- 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").
- Read to or with your child at home.



Toronto Public Health provides free confidential services to eligible families

- Breastfeeding support
- Developmental and nutrition screening
- Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC)
 - Home visiting
- Parenting education
- Postpartum adjustment support
- Prenatal and postnatal education
- Dental care
- Immunization
- Injuries and falls prevention
- Nutrition programs
- Physical activity promotion
- Smoking cessation support
- Preschool Speech and Language

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