

DPH Back to School Child Health and Safety Checklist

DOVER – While new school clothes, backpacks and school supplies can dominate parents' back-to-school lists, the Division of Public Health (DPH) shares these tips to keep your child healthier and safer during the new school year:

- **Wellness checks:** Beginning at age 2, children and adolescents need an annual wellness check-up that includes a physical examination. The health care provider will screen the child's overall health, including vision, and hearing. Immunizations are often given during these appointments.
- **Visit the dentist:** Back to school time is the perfect opportunity to get kids ready for a great year of oral health. Remember to set up dental appointments along with other routine check-ups. Wake up a few minutes earlier on school days to allow kids enough time to brush their teeth before the rush to the bus. Be on the lookout for permission slips allowing your child to participate in school based oral health programs partnering with his or her school.
- **Immunizations:** Many people know that vaccines including: Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap), Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), Hepatitis B, Polio (IPV OR OPV) and Varicella are required to enter kindergarten but most don't know that a Tdap booster and the meningococcal vaccine are required for entry to ninth-grade. The HPV Vaccine series is also strongly recommended starting at 9 years of age. For a list of required immunizations, visit: <http://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/800/804.shtml#TopOfPage> or call 800-282-8672.
- **Ease into the routine:** Switching from a summer to a

school schedule can be stressful to everyone in the household. Avoid first-day-of-school mayhem by practicing your routine a few days in advance. Set the alarm clock, go through your morning rituals, and get in the car or to the bus stop on time. Routines help children feel comfortable, and establishing a solid school routine will make the first day of school go much smoother. Work through your own anxious feelings about back-to-school. Children pick up on spoken and unspoken anxiety. The more relaxed you are about school, the more relaxed your kids will be. Put your family on a routine and emphasize sleep. For bedtime, focus on relaxation and sleep will follow.

- **Healthy lunches:** Pack nutritious lunches with protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and water or non-fat milk. Get recipe inspiration at <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>. To prevent foodborne illness, pack lunches in insulated coolers with ice packs to keep food at 40° F or below, and follow the food safety advice at this link at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/bam/nutrition/power-packing.html>. So children do not skip school meals, parents should complete and return school breakfast and lunch forms and send back-up lunch money the first few days. After school, provide your kids with healthy snacks.
- **Backpack weight:** Keep backpacks light. Most doctors and physical therapists recommend that kids carry no more than 10-15 percent of their body weight in their backpacks. Children should wear backpacks over both shoulders to reduce the risk of muscle and neck strains or injuries.
- **Reflective tape:** Buy outer clothes and backpacks with reflective tape so bus drivers and other motorists can easily see children at bus stops, or walking and bicycling to and from school.
- **Mark personal items:** In case backpacks or coats are

accidentally left at school or on the bus, mark students' personal items with their name and phone number. Make sure to write the information on the inside of items, instead of outside for the child's safety.

- **Bus safety:** Parents should review bus information with their children. Write down the bus driver's name, bus number, driver phone number, and the pick-up and drop-off times and locations. Keep that information handy at home and also include it in the child's backpack for their easy reference.
- **Pedestrian safety:** Teach children to use crosswalks and obey traffic signals, highway signs, and laws. Map out safe routes to and from school. Remind children never to accept rides, candy, or other invitations from strangers. Trustworthy adults should accompany younger children.
- **Protect their skin:** Students regularly go outside for recess, gym, and sports practices. To prevent skin cancer, cream-based (not spray) sunscreens with a Sun Protective Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, are recommended. Parents are encouraged to apply sunscreen daily before kids head off to school. If you want it applied at school for recess, field trips or late-day activities, please discuss this with your school nurse. You will need to provide written permission and the sunscreen. Older children participating in after-school sports should pack a tube of sunscreen in their sports bags, along with water for hydration and a high-protein or high-energy snack.
- **Don't forget the bug spray:** Mosquitoes can spread a variety of illnesses and make children miserable with itchy bites. Spray their clothing with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing permethrin. As with sunscreen, parents are encouraged to apply insect repellent at home daily through the fall months, and follow product instructions.

For more information about preparing children for returning to school, visit Nemours Health and Prevention Services' parenting website: <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.