

Top health tips for back-to-school children

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



Life is changing for many children and their parents – summer vacation is over and a new school year is about to begin. Here are 8 tips for staying healthy during the school year.

- **Don't pick your nose.** When you keep a bunch of kids together in one spot, viruses spread like California forest fires. But if the cold or flu virus doesn't get into your body it can't hurt you. The mucous and hairs in your nose are designed to protect you from such invaders, but if you bypass them and deposit the virus deep into your nose you are highly likely to get sick.
- **Wash your hands.** Even if you aren't a compulsive nose-picker you are likely to rub your eyes or your nose or eat with your fingers on occasion. If a cold or flu virus is hitchhiking on your fingers, this can lead to viral symptoms and result in missed school days. After a vigorous hand washing with soap, those viruses will be gone and you are free to rub, eat or pick with impunity. At the very least, wash your hands before eating anything, whenever you go to the bathroom and when you get home from school.
- **Keep your load light.** The weight of some kids' backpacks is staggering. Toting an overly heavy pack can lead to back and neck pain, tingling in the hands and headaches. If your backpack seems excessively heavy, consider leaving some books at school or getting a wheeled backpack.
- **Keep your hair pest-free.** Kids plus school equals lice. The idea is horrifying to both parents and kids, but it is a fact that none of us can ignore. Preventing an infection is certainly easier than treating one, so avoid sharing hair accessories like brushes, combs, and hair clips. Also, don't share helmets, jackets or clothes – especially if there is a current lice outbreak at school.
- **Get enough sleep.** Summer bedtimes are looser and kids get into the habit of

sleeping in. Getting up early can be brutal if you've kept to your summer bedtime schedule. Remember to change back to a school year bedtime.

- **Eat a healthy breakfast.** Not surprisingly, children who eat breakfast do better at school than those who don't – particularly if that breakfast consists of more than simple sugars. So skip the donut and opt for a high fiber cereal with fruit instead. This will help you to keep a steady blood sugar level until lunch, pay attention to the teachers and have energy throughout the school day.
- **Tell someone if you're stressed.** School is more intense than ever and many children and adolescents feel stressed-out. Chronic feelings of stress can lead to many unpleasant, and even dangerous, conditions such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression or even suicide. There are many ways that adults can help, so if you are struggling reach out to your parents, a school counselor, a friend's mom, or any other trustworthy adult.
- **Don't mix alcohol and cars.** Alcohol and cars are a dangerous combination and they should never, ever mix. Never get in a car if the driver has been drinking – whether that driver is you or someone else.

Do you have any other health tips to add?

Best of luck on the first day of school!

Dr. C.

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