

## Back-to-School Checklist to Review Health and Safety

The start of a new school year presents a good opportunity to have conversations with your children about important topics regarding health and safety.

We recommend taking time to review some key health and safety issues at the start of each academic year. These discussions might take place in the car on the way to do some school shopping, during end-of-summer vacations, or over a family dinner. The following list can be used as a checklist to review as a family or with your pediatrician and guide discussions with your child or adolescent during the exciting transition back to school.

### Safety

- Discuss stranger safety including rules about what to do if a stranger asks your child to come with him or her.
- Remind your child to always wear a seatbelt in vehicles and use a helmet when riding a bike or skateboard.
- If your child has a phone, discuss the dangers of texting during transportation including while driving, biking, or walking.
- Review your family's emergency plans for if there is a weather emergency or a fire.
- Check fire and carbon monoxide alarms in your home to ensure they are working. Consider doing this activity with your child to teach him or her about this important task.

### Nutrition

- Ensure your child eats a good breakfast every morning before school; this is one of the most important ways to avoid overeating during the day. Talk with your child and develop strategies together for how to make this happen consistently, especially if mornings are hectic for your family.
- Discuss healthy eating choices for lunch:
  - If your child brings lunch to school, consider whether your child is old enough to help pack his or her own lunch and be involved in selecting food to learn healthy choices.
  - If your child buys breakfast or lunch at school, discuss healthy choices and the importance of eating balanced meals during the day.
- Review your family's rules about limiting soda, juices, and junk food and why these rules are important.
- Check that healthy snacks are available at home.

### Healthy Habits

- Create rules about limiting screen time and avoiding soda or caffeine before bedtime.
- Talk with your children about the importance of having kind and respectful relationships with both adults and other children at their

school. Remind them that they can come to you if they have concerns about bullying or electronic aggression.

- Review your family's rules about screen time and update your family media plan. Remind your children about the importance of balancing online and offline time. In your family media plan, consider deciding on times during which using phones or screens are off-limits for all family members, such as during dinner or after a set time in the evening. If your child has a television or computer in his or her room, setting limits on screen time is especially important.
- Many teens now use social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and online games. Back to school is a good time to review rules about privacy settings on these profiles and what type of information is unsafe to post online. It is also a good opportunity to discuss how to handle common situations such as if your child sees information that seems inappropriate or scary or if a stranger tries to interact with your child online. Many families schedule check-ins to review their child's online profiles and see what kind of information your child is posting and viewing online.
- Talk with your child about what types of sports, classes, or activities he or she hopes to be involved with this school year:
  - If your child is involved in sports, ensure that he or she has safety gear that fits correctly for that sport.
- Have a family discussion about alcohol and drugs:
  - For middle and high school students, this school year may be the first time they are offered alcohol or drugs. Discuss reasons to say no and consider role playing ways in which your child would feel comfortable saying no in a social situation.
  - If your child has a back-to-school pediatrician visit, ask your pediatrician to spend time with your adolescent child alone to discuss alcohol and drugs so that your child has a safe and open place to ask any questions about these topics.
- For middle and high school students, now is a good time to discuss family rules about dating and romantic relationships:
  - Consider involving your pediatrician in these discussions if your child is dating or has questions about relationships, contraception, or related topics.
- Back-to-school visits to your pediatrician are a great time to make sure your child is up to date on vaccines:

We at *JAMA Pediatrics* wish you and your family a safe and healthy academic year!

**Author:** Megan Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH

**Resource:** American Academy of Pediatrics

The JAMA Pediatrics Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA Pediatrics*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your child's medical condition, *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests that you consult your child's physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.