

## **Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Back to School Tips**

Reading, writing and arithmetic aren't the only things that children need to help them prepare for back to school in the fall. There are several health and safety tips that will get their year off to a great start.

### **Playground Safety**

Playground accidents are one of the leading causes of injury to children in elementary school. Each year, in the United States, more than 200,000 children receive emergency department care for injuries that occurred on playground equipment. Approximately 3 out of 4 playground accidents occur on public playgrounds, including school facilities, as opposed to backyard play equipment.

The leading cause of deaths related to playgrounds and playground equipment is strangulation. Approximately, 15 children per year die from playground-related injuries such as strangulation when a piece of loose clothing or jewelry gets caught on equipment or the child's head gets stuck between climbing bars.

- For outdoor play, children's clothing and outerwear should be free of drawstrings and should fit snugly to minimize the risk of getting stuck in a piece of equipment.
- The ground should be covered 12 inches deep with shredded rubber, hardwood fiber mulch or fine sand, extending at least six feet in all directions around the equipment.
- Even with proper surfacing, teachers and playground monitors need to keep kids in sight and in reach on the playground. Simply being in the same place as the children isn't necessarily supervising — kids on a playground need an adult's undivided attention.
- For outdoor play, children's clothing and outerwear should be free of drawstrings and should fit snugly to minimize the risk of getting stuck in a piece of equipment. Do not allow kids to wear helmets, necklaces, purses or scarves on the playground or engage in any pushing, shoving or crowding around playground equipment.
- Before your child goes back to school, you might want to take a look at the school playground and, if necessary, discuss the Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines with school authorities.

### **Immunization**

Immunization is important to help protect your child from common infections. If a child is not vaccinated and is exposed to a disease germ, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight the disease. Before vaccines, many children died from diseases that vaccines now prevent, such as whooping cough, measles, and polio. Those same germs exist today, but babies are now protected by vaccines, so we do not see these diseases

as often. In most states, it is required that children who attend childcare or school be protected from certain diseases.

- So be sure to make—and keep—those appointments during your child's early years and even in the teen years.
- Check to see if your child or teen is up-to-date on his vaccines at each visit. If he gets behind, ask your doctor to help him catch up.
- Bring your child's immunization record with you and have it updated at each visit.

### Sleep

For many children and teens, summer vacation is synonymous with staying up late and sleeping in. Returning to an early morning sleep schedule can be challenging, but it is vital to the health and successful school performance of America's youth. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) is calling on parents and students to start adjusting their sleep schedules now, in order to be well-rested and alert for the start of the school year.

According to the National Sleep Foundation's 2004 and 2006 Sleep in America polls, children and teens overall do not get enough sleep. School-aged children get an average of 1.5 hours less than the recommended 10 to 11 hours of sleep per night on school nights, and only 20 percent of adolescents get the recommended 9 hours of sleep per night on school nights. In fact, nearly half of all adolescents sleep less than eight hours on school nights.

Tips for Getting Your Child's Sleep Schedule Back on Track:

- Several weeks to a month before the start of school, set a limit for the latest bedtime and wake up time. Then gradually move these times earlier (about 15 minutes every other day, time permitting) as the school year starts to approach.
- Soak in summer's last days with early mornings rather than late nights. Emphasize activity and bright light in the morning: go outside and take a walk or play with friends, don't sit indoors or in front of the television.
- Maintain a regular bedtime -- keeping the same sleep schedule makes it easier to fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning.
- Establish a sleep routine -- avoid exercising or doing anything too intellectually stimulating in the last couple of hours before going to bed.
- Create a good sleep environment -- cool, dark, quiet and comfortable.
- Limit caffeine, especially after lunchtime.
- Turn off the TV. Flickering light and distributing content can prevent good sleep. And, adolescents with four or more such items in their bedrooms were more

likely than their peers to get an insufficient amount of sleep at night and almost twice as likely to fall asleep in school and while doing homework.

### **Germs**

Although they are small and tiny exposure to germs can be a huge problem as children go back to school. Germs are found all over the world, in all kinds of places. There are four major types of germs: bacteria, viruses, fungi, and protozoa.

Addressing the spread of germs in schools is essential to the health of our youth, our schools, and our nation. Nearly 22 million school days are lost annually due to the common cold alone.

- Tell your children to wash their hands for as long as it takes them to sing their ABCs, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" or the "Happy Birthday" song." Use an antibacterial soap with warm water for best results.
- Restrain from allowing your children to share drinks with their friends. Besides passing along many simple illnesses, sharing can lead to a very serious disease called meningitis, which is a bacterial or viral infection that causes headache, high fever, vomiting, and a stiff neck. Meningitis can be fatal in some cases. Also abstain from sharing personal hygiene products such as your hairbrush.
- Sneezing is a leading way to pass germs onto others. It is recommended that if your child sneezes, to do so in a tissue or other disposable substance. When there are no tissues available, your child should turn and sneeze into the crook of your arm. Never allow your child to sneeze into his hands because he can spread and contract germs in large numbers by doing this.
- If you think that your child may be sick, it is best to opt to keep him home from school. Of course, the older your child is, and the more he understands about how to minimize passing germs to others, it may be okay to send him along.

### ***About Tips Provider:***

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, one of the leading pediatric healthcare systems in the country, is pleased to offer summer tips for parents and their children. Click on the links for more information. Children's experts are also available for interviews pertaining to these topics, as well as additional pediatric health care issues. Please contact Children's 24-hour, 7-day-a-week media pager at 404-570-9717 to reach a public relations representative immediately.

Children's is a not-for-profit organization that benefits from the generous philanthropic and volunteer support of our community. Operating three hospitals with more than half a million patient visits annually, Children's is recognized for excellence in cancer, cardiac, neonatal, orthopaedic and transplant services, as well as many other pediatric specialties. Visit our Web site at [www.choa.org](http://www.choa.org) or call 404-250-KIDS to learn more about Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.