



Add health screenings to back-to-school checklist

As summer vacation winds down, thoughts turn from jaunts to the beach to readying for a new school year. To-do lists include many of the typical tasks that precede going back to the classroom, including shopping for new clothes, purchasing school supplies and finishing summer reading assignments.

Another essential requirement parents must find time for is completing their children's health screenings and immunizations so youngsters can return to school.

Health screenings may include, but may not be limited to, routine physical exams, eye exams and dental cleanings. Each school district may have its own set of health requirements that must be met in order for children to attend school.

Many schools require that children are up-to-date with all immunizations before they can begin a new school year. While the issue of vaccinations has inspired debate in recent years, parents should recognize that many schools will only exempt students from receiving certain vaccinations due to religious reasons. For a list of state vaccination requirements and possible exemptions for schools in the United States, visit www2a.cdc.gov/nip/schoolsurv/schlimmRqmt.asp.

Students who have specific learning disabilities or medical conditions that require classroom modification should obtain recent documentation from any therapists or specialists prior to beginning a new school year. Doing so facilitates the process of setting up procedures within the school while ensuring children have what they need to excel in the classroom. All parents may want to ask doctors to provide copies of medical and immunization records so that schools will have the most recent copies on file.

Parents should schedule eye examinations well in advance of the first day of school so they have ample time to fill new prescriptions for youngsters before school begins. This ensures kids won't be starting off on the wrong foot because of vision problems that could already have been addressed.

Parents of adolescents or students on the verge of adolescence may want to address the subject of bodily changes before the school year begins anew. Address which changes can be expected, including the start of menstruation for girls. This will help children better understand what is happening



Schedule visits to the doctor, dentist and an eye doctor so your child is up-to-date upon the dawn of a new school year.

when they witness changes in themselves and fellow classmates and give them a chance to receive accurate information rather than gossip from their peers.

Keep in mind that health screenings conducted in advance of the school year may not preclude students from school-sponsored screenings. Schools may offer their own vision and hearing screenings and may take physical measurements to ensure students are growing on schedules in line with normal development.

Tips for a healthy school year

Students are most likely to get sick when school starts because being at school put children's immune systems to the test, offers The Mayo Clinic. Young children who are in close proximity to others in large groups tend to spread organisms like bacteria and viruses that cause illness. Breaking the cycle can take some work, but it's possible to make this a healthy school year.

- Encourage handwashing**
Frequent handwashing is a great way to prevent illness. Handwashing habits are essential for school-aged children and should be taught as soon as possible. Children should wash their hands after they use the bathroom and before they eat. If they've been playing outside or have interacted with children who are sick, handwashing can help remove some of the germs lingering on their hands. Antibacterial wipes are another option, but they may not be as effective as washing hands with warm, soapy water.
- Stop (some) sharing**
Sharing develops good manners and can foster new friendships. But children should be discouraged from sharing food, drinks and other personal items. Once the item has been placed in a child's mouth, it should not be shared.
- Take a sick day**
Rare is the student who will never come down with an illness. When kids get sick, keep them at home. Schools may have guidelines indicating when it is acceptable for children to return to school, and it's important that parents adhere to those guidelines so illnesses cannot spread around the school.
- Promote adequate sleep and nutrition**
While adults may need between seven and nine hours of sleep a night, children often require more. The National Sleep Foundation recommends eight to 13 hours of sleep a night for school-aged children. Begin adjusting sleep schedules during the latter part of summer vacation so that children can readjust to their regular sleep schedules.
Parents also should feed kids nutritious diets consisting of a variety of foods. Avoid high-calorie junk foods, reserving such items only as special treats every so often.

- Donate cleaning supplies**
Some schools may be underfunded and may not have enough supplies to keep all of the classrooms and surfaces clean. Parents can help by donating cleaning wipes and sprays so that students and teachers can thrive in clean, healthy environments.

How to make a dorm room your own

Children spend roughly 17 to 18 years living under Mom and Dad's roof. When the time comes to go away to college, young men or women find themselves on their own for the first time in their lives. Once youngsters move into their dorm rooms, many attempt to add a few personal touches to their new home.

All too often a college dorm room is drab and uninspiring. Universities tend to make dorm rooms sparse so they are easy to maintain. Very often walls are made from concrete or brick, and the space may not be very large. In addition, dorm rooms are often shared with a roommate, and the idea of spending semester after semester here may not be so appealing.

Students tend to arrive on campus with fixed budgets and not a lot of spending money for new furnishings, so dorm rooms often become populated with garage-sale finds and hand-me-downs. This may only add to the room's poor aesthetics.

Making a dorm room your own does not require a lot of money or know-how. It starts with a vision, a few comforts from home and some collaboration with your roommate. The following are a few tips for young men and women looking to turn their dorm rooms from drab to fab.

- * Know the dorm rules before making any permanent changes. Rather than face fines at the end of the school year, know what you can and can't do to your room before making any changes. For example, schools may frown on holes in walls or other structural changes, so invest in stick-on hooks for hanging photos on walls.
- * Consider using a dorm room planning Web site. Certain Web sites enable students to share a collaborative shopping cart with roommates so they can coordinate colors and avoid buying two of the

same items.

- * Remember, the bed is the pivotal piece of the room. Most dorm rooms fit little more than two beds and two desks. Therefore, the bulk of your design will come from outfitting your bed with a comforter that adds color and life to the room. If you haven't yet decided on a color scheme with your roommate, you may want to opt for neutral colors, or even basic black-and-white, which will blend with anything.
- * Invest in other creature comforts. A nice area rug and a few decorative lamps can remove the institutional feel of overhead fluorescent lights and cinder block walls. Task lighting enables you to get work done at your desk or to read on the bed.
- * Consider curtains to add a homey feel. While blinds certainly have their utility, fabric curtains can help absorb noise and also make a dorm room feel more like home. If your dorm room has an attached bathroom, hang a shower curtain and use thick towels to make the space seem more like home.
- * Carve out a spot for a mini refrigerator. Students should not survive on cafeteria food alone. Bring a mini refrigerator for those late-night cravings. This will save you from overpaying at vending machines or at the nearby convenience store.
- * Ask Mom what laundry detergent she uses. Smells can trigger powerful memories and emotions. Washing linens and clothing with the same detergent used at home can make school feel more familiar.
- * Don't forget photos. Frame photos of friends and family members and place them around your area of the dorm room. This way you will have familiar faces smiling back at you when you need a little pick-me-up.

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