



NEWS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
COURT HOUSE, NORRISTOWN, PA., BOX 311, 19404-0311

Frank X. Custer, Communications Director

Jessica Willingham, Communications Assistant

PHONE (610) 278-3061 FAX (610) 278-5943

COMMISSIONERS: JOSH SHAPIRO, *Chair*

LESLIE S. RICHARDS, *Vice Chair*, BRUCE L. CASTOR, JR., *Commissioner*



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“Back to School, Back to Good Health” Tips from the Montgomery County Health Department

Norristown, PA (August 4, 2014) – It’s that time of year again! Although the days are long and summer is still in full swing, families are already gearing up for back to school. Whether it is picking out clothes or uniforms or gathering school supplies like backpacks, lunchboxes, and notebooks, this time of year can be a whirlwind of preparation. It’s important to remember that a return to school requires a return to good health habits so kids can be well-rested, healthy, and focused to start the year off right. The Montgomery County Health Department (MCHD) offers some helpful tips to get kids “Back to School, Back to Good Health”:

Vaccinations

Before returning to school, many children are required to be up-to-date on their vaccinations. Children who are 4 to 6 years old are due for boosters of four vaccines: DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis), chickenpox, MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), and polio. Preteens and teens need Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis), HPV (human papillomavirus), and meningococcal vaccines when they are 11 to 12 years old. In addition, yearly flu vaccines are recommended for all children 6 months and older.

Vaccines are among the safest and most cost-effective ways to prevent disease. Protecting children from preventable diseases will help keep them healthy and in school. Talk to your doctor or other healthcare professional to make sure your children get the vaccinations they need when they need them. Parents can find out more about the recommended immunization schedule at

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html.

Nutrition

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the health of a student is linked to academic success. Help your child start the year off right with a healthy breakfast, lunch, and

snacks. The nutritional guidelines outlined on <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/> are a great place to start. Try incorporating whole grains, fresh produce, dairy, and lean protein into meals. Limit sugar, especially sugary drinks, salt, and saturated fat. A great first step is to provide more fruits and vegetables at each meal. A piece of whole fruit, cut melon, or 100% fruit juice combined with a whole grain cereal will provide the nutrition and energy an active child needs during the school day. Carrot or celery sticks with hummus or ranch dip can easily be added to a lunch or snack to replace salty chips. When packing a sandwich, try using whole wheat bread or a whole wheat wrap. Instead of sugary drinks, try packing skim milk or water. For picky eaters or children who are hesitant to try something new, try cutting fruit and sandwiches into fun shapes with cookie cutters to make them more appealing. Fun recipes and ideas can be found <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/kids/>.

Hand Hygiene

Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to help stop the spread of infection and keep kids healthy. It is never too early to start teaching children to wash their hands. Children don't always understand when to wash their hands or why they need to do this. Try explaining to your children that germs cause coughs, colds, and tummy aches and that germs are too small to see, but can be found almost anywhere, from the playground, to toys, to desks, and can spread easily.

To help reduce the spread of germs, children should wash their hands at school at the following times: before eating lunch, snacks, and any food preparation activities, and after using the toilet, coughing, sneezing, blowing their nose, playing outside, touching or handling class pets, or whenever hands look dirty or a dirty surface has been touched. It is also important to make sure that your kids know how to properly clean their hands. For more information, please visit the CDC page [Clean Hands Save Lives](#).

Additional Tips

To help ease back-to-school butterflies, try to transition kids into a consistent school-night routine a few weeks before school starts. Also make sure that they:

- Get enough sleep by establishing a reasonable bedtime so that they'll be well-rested and ready to learn in the morning
- Write down the need-to-know info to help them remember details such as their locker combination, what time classes and lunch start and end, their homeroom and classroom numbers, teachers' and/or bus drivers' names, etc.
- Use a wall calendar or personal planner to record when assignments are due, tests will be given, extracurricular practices and rehearsals will be held, etc.

- Have them organize and set out what they need the night before (homework and books should be put in their backpacks by the door and clothes should be laid out in their bedrooms).

These tips should contribute to helping your child stay on the road to a healthy mind and body. For more information, please talk to your healthcare provider, or call the Montgomery County Health Department at 610-278-5117 or visit their website at www.montcopa.org/health.