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Get school year off to a good start

School is starting soon. Are you ready? Buying new clothes and school supplies is always a priority, but that's only two of the many tasks parents face to help their kids start the school year off right.

Parents, children, and teachers all start the year with at least one thing in common: some anxiety about what the new year will bring. Parents are concerned about their children's safety and their ability to successfully meet new challenges. Students, displaying different levels of self-confidence, worry about their ability to make friends, do schoolwork, and meet adults' expectations. Teachers, too, have concerns about classroom effectiveness, MCAS results, and meeting curriculum standards with the available time, funding, and support.

A few tips for a good start to the year:

Health information:

Massachusetts's regulations require every child to have a documented health history and physical examination when entering a school system for the first time and every three or four years, thereafter. Usually, the examination is performed and the form completed by the family physician or pediatrician. It is important to schedule a medical visit as soon as possible after receiving school forms or requests for health-related information because the demand for appointments is exceptionally heavy at this time of year.

Schools depend on such information provided by parents. Make certain they're informed of any changes in your child's health. They need to be alerted to allergies, such as bee stings and peanuts, and chronic diseases like asthma or diabetes. Inform the school about changes in medication and whether the school will be administering medicines. Massachusetts has comprehensive requirements about medication use in school and parents must make this discussion a critical part of planning for a new school year.

Do you have an emergency arrangement with your child's school in the event of accident or illness? Does the school know the names and numbers of your physicians and what hospital you prefer? Can the school reach you in a crisis? Make sure the school has current, functional phone numbers for parents and emergency contacts that cover the entire school day.

Backpacks:

Backpacks, used by over 90 percent of school children to carry books and other materials to and from school, have been linked in national surveys to thousands of injuries each year. To prevent injuries, consider rolling backpacks or those with wide padded straps. When full, the pack should not weigh more than 20 percent of the child's weight. Be sure to balance the contents by keeping books and heavy items near the back, and having the straps tight enough to prevent the pack from flopping around.

The beginning of the school year is like baseball, football, or basketball season. Everyone is full of expectation and enthusiasm but anxious about potential obstacles. Investing time and energy in the pre-season will help get the year off to a great start, improving the odds for a championship year!

Feel free to contact me at NSMC North Shore Children's Hospital, 57 Highland Ave., Salem, MA 01907 or at ebailey@aap.org with your questions or comments.

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