3 HOW TO BREATHE EASY
WITH THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

4 YOUR CHILDREN’S HEALTH
AND SAFETY: A QUICK REVIEW

6 IN THE BAG: SEVEN WAYS TO
MAKE SCHOOL LUNCHES HEALTHY

In every issue: HOUSE CALL
When a Sick Child Should Stay Home
Symptoms of Bulimia in Teens

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Question: When should my child take a sick day?

Answer: The scenario is common. It's almost time to leave for the bus, and your child is complaining of a headache and sore throat. What should you do? Knowing when to send your student off to school and when to keep her home can be a tough judgment call. When you're wondering how sick is too sick for school, a few general guidelines can help. You may want to keep your child home if she has any of the following symptoms:

- Diarrhea
- Repeated vomiting
- Fever
- Severe sore throat
- Thick discharge from the eye
- Mouth sores accompanied by drooling
- Wheezing
- Uncontrolled or severe coughing
- Unusual fatigue
- Difficulty breathing
- Weakness

- Dry mouth
- Unexplained irritability
- Skin problems, including discolored skin, rashes, or itchiness
- Decreased appetite

Question: My teen seems very unhappy about her body/weight. I'm worried she might be bulimic. What are some warning signs of bulimia?

Answer: Most people don't like something about their bodies. But when discontent becomes deep unhappiness, your teen may experience problems with academic performance or personal relationships. A negative body image also can increase risk for depression, anxiety, and social phobias. And it has been linked to eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia, which can have serious health consequences.

Teens with bulimia generally go on eating splurges, called binges, and then try to avoid gaining weight by purging with laxatives or throwing up. Other warning signs could include:

- Reddened, calloused, or scarred fingers from inducing vomiting
- Swollen cheeks or neck glands
- Teeth that look clear or are decayed from stomach acid
- Frequent use of the bathroom after meals.

As always, talk to a doctor if your child shows signs of an eating disorder.

Do you have a question for the pediatric experts at Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics? Submit your question by sending an e-mail to thassen@cmh.edu or writing the editor: Telisa Hassen, Community Relations, Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, 2401 Gillham Road, Kansas City, MO 64108. We will answer as many inquiries as possible.
The first day of school can be an exciting time for you and your child. But if your child has asthma, school can pose special concerns. How will she avoid asthma triggers? What if she has an asthma attack at school?

Keep in mind that your child is not alone. According to Jay Portnoy, MD, Section Chief, Allergy/Asthma/Immunology at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UKMC School of Medicine, “Between 10 and 15 percent of children have asthma, making it one of the most common health conditions at school.” In fact, many experts estimate that an average classroom has two students with asthma.

Here are some tips to help you plan a healthy and successful school year for your student.

Prepare for the First Day of School

- Develop a written school asthma management plan with your child’s doctor. Include information about your child’s asthma triggers, daily medications, and peak flow “personal best,” which is the highest rate of air your child can breathe out of his lungs, as measured by a peak flow meter. Provide instructions for emergency care and important telephone numbers. Make copies of this plan for school personnel responsible for your child.
- Pack a special bag for your child that includes asthma supplies, such as a peak flow meter, inhaler, and medicine. Include a “spacer” device if your child uses one.
- Meet with your child’s teachers, coaches, and school nurses. Make sure they are trained in caring for the special needs of students with asthma and know the procedures to handle an emergency.
- Discuss how to minimize exposure to asthma triggers, such as classroom pets and certain foods, and precautions to take to prevent exercise-induced asthma during physical education class. For instance, taking asthma medicine before gym class can help prevent exercise-induced symptoms. If you don’t know your child’s asthma triggers, an allergist can help.
- Make sure your child does not sit near a dusty chalkboard or mats that may contain dust mites.
- Encourage your child to be active during and after school. Regular exercise has been shown to improve asthma symptoms. One study found that children with asthma were more likely to exercise if their parents thought they could be as active as their peers.
- Test your child on how to use his or her inhaler. Research shows that fewer than 50 percent of children benefit from asthma medicine taken through an inhaler because they don’t use the inhaler correctly.

Tips for the School Year

- Walk around the school building and surrounding grounds. Notice if there are dusty areas, water damage from leaks where mold could grow, and strong chemical odors from cleaning and art supplies. Work with school personnel to correct any problem areas that may increase the risk of your child’s asthma worsening during the school day.
- When a field trip is scheduled, make sure an accompanying school staff member has training to handle an asthma emergency.

“With proper treatment, children with asthma should be able to participate in the same activities as those who don’t have it,” says Dr. Portnoy. "Remember, if your child’s asthma is interfering with his quality of life, he should get tested and get treated.”

For more back-to-school tips, visit our Web site at www.childrensmercy.org/backtoschool.
Illness and injury can spoil the fun and learning that school provides. You can help protect your child with these health and safety tips:

**Healthy Habits**

“Open communication and good role modeling are two of the best ways to give your children a happy and healthy childhood,” says John Cowden, MD, General Pediatrics at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UKMC School of Medicine. Regular medical checkups are also a must to keep your child healthy. These tips are also important:

- **Keep immunizations up-to-date.** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends a series of immunizations that begins in infancy and includes booster shots for school-age children. Check with your child’s doctor about your state’s requirements for schoolchildren.

- **Teach children to wash, wash, wash their hands.** Research has proven that washing hands often with soap and water is one of the most effective ways to stop illnesses from spreading among children. Also, remind your child not to share toothbrushes, hairbrushes, combs, or facial tissues.

- **Keep children home when they’re sick.** The AAP recommends that children stay home from school if they have a fever, are too sick to participate in class, or have a contagious condition. When in doubt, ask your child’s doctor.

- **Alert the school about necessary medications.** Most schools require a written note from the parent for a child who needs to take medication. A written order from the child’s doctor also may be needed. Call the school nurse or principal to verify your school’s policy.

**Rules for Bus Riders**

Most school bus-related injuries occur when children are getting either on or off the bus. If your children ride the bus, review these two simple rules:

- **Stand about 6 feet—three “giant steps”—away from the curb while waiting for the bus.**
- **Move away from the bus immediately after getting off.** Wait for the driver to signal “OK” before crossing in front of the bus.

**Play it Safe**

During playground time, make sure your children know they should:

- go down slides slowly, feet first, one child at a time
- stand clear of moving swings
A Safety Checklist for Kids’ Backpacks

Carrying heavy backpacks can lead to back pain, muscle fatigue and soreness, and other problems. Here’s how to lighten your kids’ loads:

- **Pack it smart.** Experts advise not letting children carry more than 15 percent of their body weight in their backpacks. Put the heaviest items closest to your child’s back.
- **Buy a pack with a waist strap—and make sure your children use it for heavy loads.**
- **Tell your kids to bend with both knees when picking up a heavy pack.**
- **Make sure the straps of the backpack are wide and padded for comfort.**
- **Tell your kids it’s important to carry it evenly.** A recent study concluded that carrying a pack on only one shoulder boosts the risk of back pain in adolescents.

Stranger Danger

Many parents’ greatest fear is that their children will fall victim to a violent crime. While your children should certainly be cautious of strangers, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children says that most child abductions, assaults, and molestations are perpetrated by someone known to the family. Teach your children that they should:

- **never get into a car or go anywhere with a stranger**
- **be suspicious of and get away from any stranger who asks for directions**
- **go immediately to the checkout counter, security office, or lost-and-found if they become separated from you in a public place. Instruct them not to wander around looking for you.**
- **tell you immediately if anyone—a stranger or someone they know—approaches or touches them in a way that makes them uncomfortable.**

Dr. Cowden says, “There are so many things for parents to worry about as their children grow up and become more independent. Getting support from your doctor is important, but remember that children rely on parents to give them love, respect, and consistent teaching about being healthy and secure.”
**Multitasking Is Not Good for Learning**

If your child is trying to remember something, don’t have her try to do it while she’s distracted. New research shows that when she’s distracted, she’ll use a different brain system to learn than she normally would. She’ll also have a tougher time recalling what she’s learned in new situations or environments.

Besides avoiding distraction, improve her ability to remember new things by:

- Connecting new information to something she already knows, such as a familiar song.
- Using notes and lists to help jog her memory.
- Repeating someone’s name or other new information when she first learns it.

**In the Bag: Seven Ways to Make School Lunches Healthy**

Want to pack a healthy lunch your kids will eat? Try these foods:

1. **Try grain.** Choose healthy whole-grain bread, tortillas, pitas, bagels, or crackers.
2. **Lower the fat.** Try low-fat versions of lunchmeat. Tuna packed in water instead of oil also is a good choice. Use mustard instead of mayonnaise. Or try low-fat or no-fat mayo.
3. **“Veg out.”** Add thinly sliced veggies to a sandwich. Pack a bag of carrots or raw veggies.
4. **Don’t forget fruit.** Pack a banana. Send kids off with applesauce or cottage cheese in a plastic bowl. Slice an apple, an orange, or a melon into a snack bag. Fill a bag with raisins, dried apples, or grapes.
5. **Say yes to yogurt.** Include a low-fat yogurt with a spoon. Let your child choose the flavor.
6. **Pack a snack.** Put pretzels or air-popped, low-fat popcorn in snack bags.
7. **Add a treat.** For dessert, try a low-fat granola bar. Vanilla wafer cookies and graham crackers are other good choices.

Want More Back-to-School Tips?

Visit [www.childrensmercy.org/backtoschool](http://www.childrensmercy.org/backtoschool). You’ll find additional information about good homework habits, as well as “brain food,” the immunizations your child needs, handling bullies, and more!
All preteens need regular checkups, doctors say. Why? Because they can help keep your preteen healthy.

During an exam, your doctor can check your child’s growth. The doctor also can check your preteen for any problems that could affect his or her health. These include physical problems as well as school and family problems.

“The preteen visit is very important for both the child and the parent. Transitioning from having the parent give all the history to the preteen being more involved is the beginning of the process of independence,” says Daryl Lynch, MD, Section Chief, Adolescent Medicine at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine.

Be Prepared
Make the most of your preteen’s checkup. Bring a list of all your child’s medicines to the doctor. This includes over-the-counter medicines and vitamins. Also, remind your doctor about any allergies or past medical problems your preteen has.

Not sure what to expect? During the exam, your doctor may check your preteen’s:

- blood pressure
- vision
- hearing
- weight and eating habits.

Your doctor also may talk about the risks of smoking, drug abuse, and other behaviors.

Be Involved
A checkup is a great time to ask questions. Worried about problems at home or school? Does your preteen sleep too much or too little? Or snack too much? Write down your questions so you remember to ask your doctor. Also, keep these tips in mind:

- If your youngster needs a test, ask why if you aren’t sure.
- If your child needs medicine, make sure you know the name. Also, know what the medicine does.
- Ask your doctor what to do if your child ever needs emergency care.
- Don’t forget to ask when to schedule your preteen’s next checkup.

“Parents staying involved with their children provides protection and guidance that this age group desperately needs,” says Dr. Lynch.

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The section of Adolescent Medicine at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics provides primary and specialty care for youth ages 12 to 21, emphasizing wellness and prevention. To learn more about the services offered, including our Teen Clinic, call (816) 234-3050 or visit our Web site at www.childrensmercy.org.
Bring the whole family and join us for the Back-To-School Fair!

Sponsored by Children’s Mercy Healthy Kids University
Brought to you by Kohl’s Department Stores
Saturday, July 28, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Clarion Hotel Sports Complex,
9103 E. 39th Street (I-70 at Blue Ridge Cut-off)

Interactive, educational booths for parents and kids on how to pack a healthy lunch, making sure your child’s backpack is not too heavy, developing good study habits, and much more!

Information on child health and safety:
● booster seat safety
● Internet safety
● bicycle and pedestrian safety
● and more!

Refreshments, activities and games, fun giveaway items, and drawings for prizes!

For details, check our Web site at www.childrensmercy.org/backtoschool.