



## **3 Ways Your Primary Care Physician Can Help Your Child Be Ready Physically and Mentally for the New School Year**

Back to school season is officially here, and that includes scheduling a visit with your primary care physician at the start of the new academic year.

Some schools in the country require children to have completed a physical examination before starting school, especially if they intend to participate in sports. But instead of treating these checkups as another item on your “to do” list, make the most of these visits by treating them as an excellent opportunity for your child to receive an overall physical and mental health check-up.

As parents, we know how significantly our children can change from one school year to the next. The annual back-to-school checkup can help you and your pediatrician or family physician monitor the change in your child’s physical and mental development and discuss any lifestyle changes that could be made to improve their wellbeing. Furthermore, it helps them determine if other physician specialists may be required to promote life-long health and wellness.

Here are three areas to focus on to help your child get ready for the new school year:

### **1. Prepare in advance for your child’s annual back-to-school checkup**

Many young children get anxious before their physical examination. To ease their apprehension and help them feel comfortable meeting with a physician-led healthcare team, spend a few minutes talking to your child about the visit. Explain to them what to expect during the exam and how it will help. Have an honest discussion with your children about any changes they have been experiencing, physically and mentally, so they can relay that information to your primary care physician.

As a parent, you also want to do a little “homework” before the visit. Create a list of questions you want to discuss with your physician as well as write down any nonprescription medications your child is taking and the reasons why. Furthermore, be prepared to discuss where other aspects of your child’s health currently stand (e.g., dental, eyes, nutrition, etc.). A little advanced preparation will go a long way toward maximizing your visit.

### **2. Make sure your child’s vaccinations are current**

One of the more important outcomes during the back-to-school checkup is making sure your child is current with required vaccinations. Discuss additional vaccinations – such as ones for the upcoming flu season – that your primary care physician recommends. Also, mention



vaccinations or shots (e.g., Covid-19) your child received that may not have been administered by your primary care physician's office so your physician has up-to-date medical records.

### **3. Encourage your child to discuss their mental health**

Even during the best of times many children can become anxious about starting or returning to school. A national Harris Poll survey conducted for [On Our Sleeves](#), a mental health initiative of Nationwide Children's Hospital found that 79% of parents with school-age children believe their kids will face mental health challenges returning to school this year. Key issues include safety concerns (44% of children), bullying (33%) and lingering issues related to the pandemic (32%).

During the annual checkup, encourage your child to talk openly about their mental health and how it's affecting life at home, during the school day and spending time with friends. That discussion will help your physician determine if a specialist needs to be part of your child's care team.

The back-to-school season is an exciting time for your children. Your primary care physician can play an important role in helping make sure your child is physically and mentally ready and able to succeed in the new school year.

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