

## Healthy and happy at school

Starting primary school is a very exciting milestone. Below are some tips from the Barwon Division of General Practice for keeping children healthy and happy in the classroom and the playground.

- 1) **Check your child's immunisation record:** All four year old children are due for immunisations before they start school to protect them from tetanus, diphtheria, polio, whooping cough, measles, mumps and rubella. Parents should receive their child's Immunisation History Record in the mail to provide to the school after their child has received their 4 year old immunisations. Parents can request a copy of the statement from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register by calling 1800 653 809.
- 2) **Have a Healthy Kids Check:** Along with immunisations, your GP can carry out some other important tests to make sure your child is ready for school. Tests include: hearing, eyesight, body mass index (height and weight), speech, gross and fine motor skills. It is helpful for any problems to be detected early so that intervention can be put in place.
- 3) **Go for 2 & 5 in the lunchbox:** It is recommended that children eat 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables every day. Pack fruit that children can eat easily such as a banana or an apple or cut an orange into quarters. Small serves of dried fruit such as sultanas are also a healthy lunchbox snack. Try including carrot, celery or cucumber sticks in the lunchbox. Water should be the drink of choice for children as it contains no sugar. Although juice is often considered a healthy choice, it usually contains as much sugar as some soft drinks which is not good for children's teeth and can provide unnecessary calories. It is much better for children to eat a piece of fruit than to drink fruit juice, although watering down fruit juice is a sensible option for children who will not drink water.
- 4) **Get Active:** For some children, starting school will be the first time they will have to sit still for long periods so make sure they get to run around and play at the end of the day. Going for a walk or playing in the backyard with the family dog are good ways to relax after a school day.
- 5) **Sleep:** The average five year old needs about 10 hours sleep per night, although some children need much more or slightly less. Starting school can be an exhausting experience, so it is important that children get plenty of sleep to help them tackle each new day. Consistent bed times are important and it often helps to have a bed time ritual such as a bath, reading a story or another form of quiet time before bed.
- 6) **Playground issues:** Children can find starting school very overwhelming with all the new faces, new rules and different routines. It is important that children feel safe and happy at school. Find out about the school's anti-bullying policy and discuss it with your child. Discuss any concerns about bullying or how your child is coping at school with your child's teacher. If

you have ongoing concerns about your child's mental health, talk to your GP.

**Other tips:**

- 7) **Kidsafe Earphones:** A study from the Hearing Cooperative Research Centre indicated at least one-in-six Australians had permanent hearing damage, with at least 30 per cent exposing themselves to dangerous decibel levels through prolonged use of portable music players. There are now earphones on the market designed especially for children that have volume-limiting devices to protect hearing. If your child listens to music with headphones, ask about child-safe earphones at your local electronics store.
  
- 8) **Swim Safe:** Learning to swim is an important skill in our hot Australian climate and it's a great way to keep fit and healthy. Most schools will offer swimming as part of their Physical Education program but you may wish to enrol your child in swimming lessons at the local pool for more intensive instruction. Parents should also keep up to date with CPR, ensure backyard pools are fenced and gates are shut and always supervise children swimming.