

Check-ups, safety tips for back-to-school set

By Steve Hartado
Copley News Service

The changing of the school bell marks the onset of a season of worry. Students wrinkle their brows over tests, homework and what to wear on the first day of school. Parents' thoughts turn to more serious matters, namely the health and safety of their school-age children.

Common worries range from how a child will fare going to and from school on his own to whether he really was well enough to go to school, despite the fact that his temperature was normal.

But, with a little guidance from his parents, a child can be just as prepared to face the world virtually on his own for a few hours as he is for that first spelling test or art project. And, his parents won't have to worry as much. Following is a parent's checklist of back-to-school safety and health tips.

GENERAL HEALTH
While you can't predict when your child will get his next cold or cavity, sending him to school with a clean bill of health can start the school year off right.

- **Eyes:** By the time a child reaches kindergarten age, he should have a thorough eye examination that is specifically geared toward children, rather than adults, according to the American Optometric Association.

- **Vision:** Through such an exam, an optometrist can tell if the child has the vision skills vital to learning, and can treat any deficiencies through prescription lenses, a controlled program of visual tasks called vision therapy or both. Examinations should be performed at periodic intervals thereafter.

- **Vision correction:** eyeglasses probably are the safest bet for children. But today's small-framed frames are anything but boring in bold colors and shapes that are sturdy enough for playground treatment, says Cathy Kate, fashion eyewear buyer for Sterling Optical.

- **Teeth:** Children are especially cavity-prone around the ages of 6 to 8, and again in adolescence, so a visit to the dentist prior to the first day of school is in order.

- **To stop cavities before they start,** many of today's pediatric dentists use sealants that are painted on the teeth's chewing sur-

faces to close the pits and grooves in which most cavities start. Another new twist: dentists are sending kids to the orthodontist earlier to head off tooth-crowding troubles.

- **Checkups:** The start of school means shot-in-the-arm and checkup time for many children. Some pediatricians even schedule special office hours to accommodate the back-to-school crowd.

LATCHKEY KIDS
An estimated 5 million "latchkey children" between the ages of 5 and 12 look after themselves while their parents are at work, according to Working Mother magazine. But the all-alone hours don't have to be lonely, scary hours for a child. A parent can:

- **Help their child make a schedule,** suggests the National PTA. Having a structure makes free time less lonely. A sample: 3:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., call Mom or Dad; 4:00 p.m. to 4 p.m., change clothes and fix a snack in the microwave; 4 to 5 p.m., homework.

- **Make home a safe place to be** with safety chains, a door "peep-hole" and other internal locks to keep doors and windows secure. With an answering machine, kids never have to explain where their parents are or why they're home alone.

- **Buy a best friend — a pet.** A well-trained pet can be a child's protector, and even raise the alarm to alert neighbors if there's trouble, according to the Pets Are Wonderful Council.

- **Teach safety.** Talking about possible problems won't frighten possible problems won't frighten them, according to the National PTA. Make sure children know never to enter a house when a door is ajar, and have them practice safety measures every day. Teach them about first aid, and keep a list of emergency phone numbers and first aid kit handy.

- **You can supplement your instruction** with children's books and videos that cover different aspects of safety.

EN ROUTE
Parents are justified in worrying about their kids traveling to and from school — it's estimated that about 1,500 children die each year in pedestrian accidents, ac-

ording to the American Academy of Pediatrics.
Whether they're traveling on foot, via bike, scooter, moped or skateboard, or as a passenger in a car pool, here are some tips to ensure they make it to school and home safely.

- **Kids should ride with the traffic,** not against it, so drivers can see them, according to the "Team Prince" Bicycle Safety Guide.

- **Kids always should wear a hard-shell helmet** when riding a

bike or skateboard. It should cover the back of the head, but not block view or make it difficult to hear.

- **Putting reflective materials** on your children's clothing or backpacks can help make them more visible to motorists, according to the AAP.

- **Parents who drive in car pools** should make sure their car is in top-notch condition. An insurance agent can tell you if you have adequate liability coverage in light of the increased risk of more passengers.

Safety; a bike that fits!

A safe bike is a bike that fits the rider. No matter what size your child is, there's a bicycle that's comfortable and safe for him.

Even though he's still growing, it's best not to buy a bigger bike than he needs, thinking that it will "fit" him later, according to the brochure, "The Bicycle Safety Guide," produced by the Prince Co. The bike is right if:

- The rider can rest the balls of his feet lightly on the ground while he's sitting on the seat.
- He can reach the bottom pedal without pointing his toes when he's riding.
- He's able to reach the handle-

bars comfortably when he's sitting on the seat.

- He can reach the hand brakes easily — and his hands are large and strong enough to squeeze the levers.

- When the rider straddles a boy's-style bicycle with both feet on the ground, there should be 1 inch of space between the top bar and the rider.

Don't just buy a bike for your child — get a lock, too. Register it with the local police department. And, be sure to write down the bike's serial number, and to have your child keep it in a safe place.

protect our children...
DRIVE SAFELY NONE! for the ROAD

Take precautions to make 1987-88 a safe sports year

Getting a "D" on the first pop quiz of the year or losing the title of homecoming queen by five measly votes can dampen any student's back-to-school spirits for a day or two. But an injury can ruin a whole season for the aspiring young athlete who suddenly finds himself relegated to the bench.

Thousands of young athletes have their efforts stopped short by a sports-related injury that could have been prevented or minimized. Careful attention to proper training and conditioning tech-

niques can help young athletes reduce their risk of injury, especially during football season, when the incidence of sports injuries increases.

There is a degree of risk in any sport, even those with professional coaches and trainers. A study by the NCAA ranked sports by their injury rate, and among the highest-risk sports were wrestling, football, men's lacrosse, women's gymnastics, women's volleyball and baseball.

But there's a much higher risk

for young athletes who are coached by untrained or volunteer coaches, says William P. Curran Jr., M.D., a San Diego orthopedist.

"Sports can be a very important aspect of a youngster's life," Curran says. "But they risk permanent injury if they allow themselves to be driven by individuals who value scores over skills."

Proper supervision by skilled coaches can go a long way toward teaching youngsters proper athletic techniques — ones that minimize the risk of injury, Curran says. He suggests more seminars for coaches and others involved in youth sports programs, similar to those available for professionals.

Once trained, coaches can stop bad habits that can lead to injury. For example, Curran is concerned about football players who incorrectly use their heads as spears or battering rams.

"Above all — remember it's normal to be nervous before taking an important test. Usually your anxiety will diminish when you answer an essay, in case you think of additional information later."

Always look over the entire test before you hand it in.

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Testing

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- Since the point value assigned to a question usually reflects the number of points you are required to make in your answer, spend the most time on questions that have the most point value.

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