

A Healthy Start to School



A guide for parents and caregivers.

Look inside for helpful tips on packing lunches, reporting immunizations, limiting screens and much more!

A Healthy Start

The transition to school is an exciting time for children and their families. As parents, you play an important role in the positive development of your children. Public Health is a partner in preparing your child for a healthy start to school.

The Healthy Schools Team at the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) works with schools to promote healthy living throughout your child's development.



Comprehensive School Health Program

The goal of the MLHU School Health Team is to promote the health of children and contribute to a positive and healthy school climate.

The team uses a Comprehensive Health Promotion Approach and works with School Boards, staff and families of elementary schools. The School Health Team is involved in the development and implementation of healthy school policies and works with partners to create supportive environments in schools.

Contact your School Public Health Nurse (PHN) to determine how they can collaborate with your school to improve the health of children. To contact a Public Health Nurse assigned to your school please email healthyschools@mlhu.on.ca



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Car Seat Safety

Selecting the right child car seat for your child's height, weight and development is important as their safety depends on it. Moving your child out of the appropriate seat too soon puts them at risk in the event of a crash.

The law requires children to use a car seat from birth to 18 kilograms (40 lbs.). It's best to continue using a car seat until they reach the manufacturer's height or weight limits for your seat. Once they outgrow the car seat, a child must move to a booster seat. The booster seat puts the child at the right height so that the adult seat belt is in the correct position on their body.

A booster seat must be used if your child:

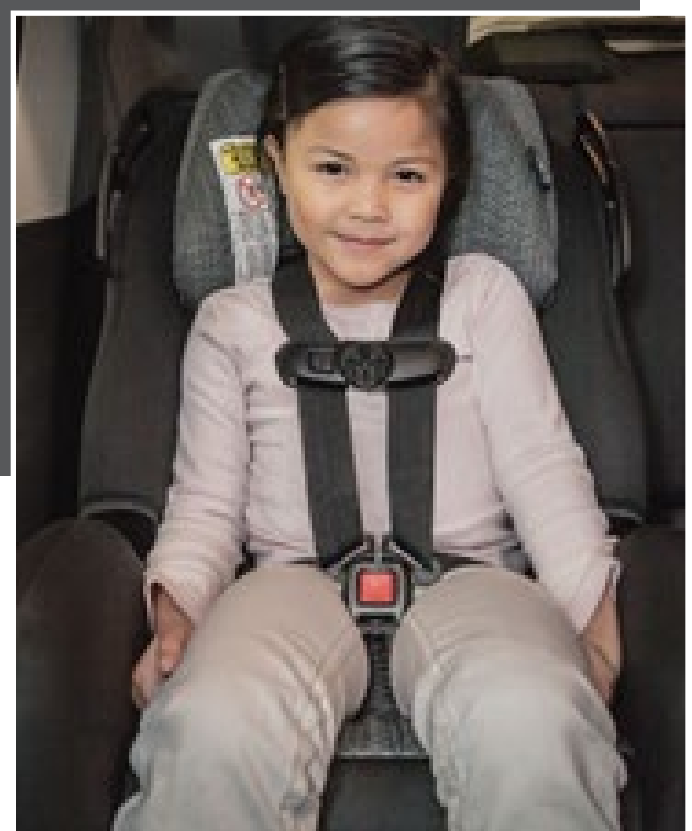
- Is under the age of eight **and**
- Weighs less than 80lbs **and**
- Is less than 145 cm tall (4 feet 9 inches)

The safest practice is to continue using the booster seat past 8 years of age, until the child reaches 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches) tall.

For more information, visit:

www.healthunit.com/forward-facing-car-seats
or www.healthunit.com/booster-seats

Source: www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/choose-car-seat.shtml



Staying Healthy

Infections and viruses, like COVID-19, can spread quickly. Over the last year Public Health practices such as: school screening; cohorting; masking; hand hygiene and physical distancing have helped to keep schools as safe as possible. As the pandemic evolves, the 2021-22 school year may look different. Stay tuned for more information on this closer to the start of the school year!

Remind your child not to share objects like water bottles or utensils that touch mouths. Proper hand hygiene will always be a key practice to help reduce the risk of infections and illnesses.

Encourage your child to wash their hands:

- After they use the washroom
- Before eating
- Anytime their hands look dirty
- After touching animals
- After sneezing and coughing



If your child is not well, they should stay home. Be sure to have a plan in place to care for sick children at home. For information on common illnesses and infections and how to care for a sick child please visit: www.caringforkids.cps.ca . If you are looking for information about COVID-19 and schools please visit: www.healthunit.com/covid-19-schools



Reporting Immunizations

Public health needs to know EVERY TIME your child receives an immunization. This is a legal requirement under the province's Immunization of School Pupils Act. Immunizations protect children from serious and life-threatening illnesses that can be easily spread in school. Under the legislation, children must have proof of immunization against:

- Tetanus
- Mumps
- Polio
- Diphtheria
- Measles
- Meningococcal
- Pertussis
- Rubella
- Varicella

During the school year, notices may be sent to students that have missed immunizations or when vaccine information is incomplete. To report your child's immunizations, you will need a copy of your child's immunization record. If you do not have a copy of the immunization record, contact your healthcare provider.

Ways to Report your Child's Immunizations:



Online: www.healthunit.com/immunizationrecords

If you cannot report online, please use one of the following options:



• Phone: 519-663-5317



• Fax: 519-663-0416



• Mail or In-person:

355 Wellington Street, Suite 110 London, Ontario N6A 3N7

PLEASE NOTE: If using one of these three alternative options, you will need to include your child's full name, date of birth, contact information, and address.

Questions? Call 519-663-5317

Family Time and Routines

Families are busy! Managing work, school, family time, household tasks, and outside commitments each day can feel like a lot. Staying connected and establishing routines are an important part of raising confident, happy and successful children. When life gets busy it's best to keep it simple. Use everyday opportunities and routines to connect with your child and keep you organized.

For example:

- Go for walks together.
- Chat with your child while you walk or drive.
- Ask about their day and listen with interest.
- Plan to eat family meals together when possible.
- Play family games.
- Take time to praise their efforts.
- Thank them when they help out.
- Create a screen-free morning and bedtime routine.
- Be a role model, limit your own screen time when your kids are around.
- Develop a regular bedtime routine including relaxing activities such as reading, listening to calm music or laying in bed talking quietly about the day.



A Healthy Start to School

Limiting Screens

 A photograph of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a red dress with white floral patterns, looking down at a tablet computer she is holding.

Is she getting enough face time with you?

Young children learn best by interacting face-to-face with caring adults. Not with screens.

Make time for reading, singing, dancing, arts and crafts, and playing outside.

Limit screen time

- Under 2 years old: No screen time
- 2 to 5 years old: Less than 1 hour per day

Tune in to kids

- Turn off screens when no one is watching
- Turn off screens at least 1 hour before bed
- Watch with your children
- Choose content that is right for their age
- Set limits when children are young
- Be a good role model: Limit your own screen time, especially around your children

More info: www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Canadian Paediatric Society **caring for kids**
Innovation by parents from Canada's paediatricians

Sleep Routines

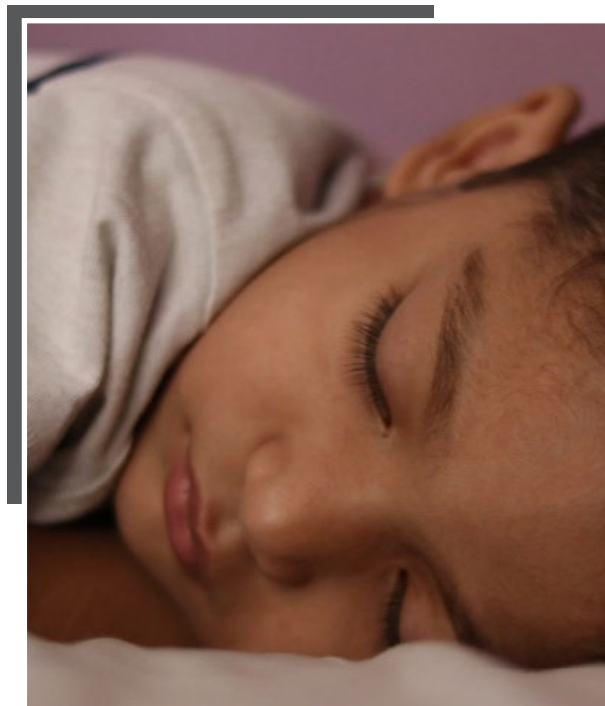
How much Sleep is Recommended?

Preschoolers (3-5 yrs)	10-13 hrs
School aged children (6-12 yrs)	9-12 hrs

A guide for parents and caregivers

Tips for a Goodnight's Sleep:

- Try to avoid giving your child foods or drinks that have caffeine.
- Avoid screens at least one hour before bedtime. For example, phones, tablets, televisions, or video games in the bedroom.
- Ensure children enjoy some active play every day. Physical activity during the day can help a child to sleep better at night.
- Acknowledge your child's fears. If your child has nightmares, reassure and comfort them.
- If you have questions or concerns about your child's sleep habits, please consult with your healthcare provider or visit the Canadian Pediatric Society's website at www.caringforkids.cps.ca for more tips and information.



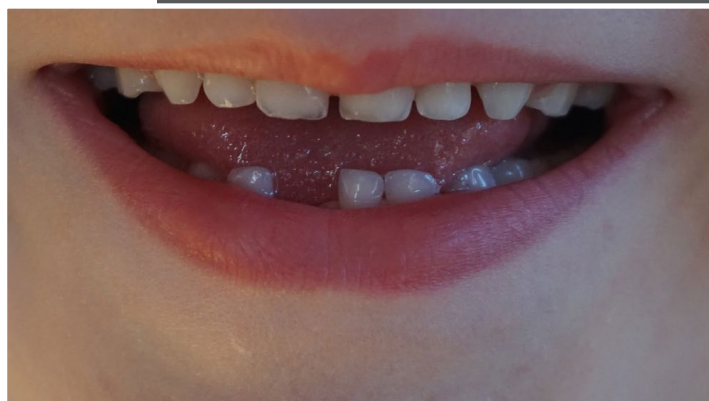
Dental Screening

Many children miss school because of tooth decay. When tooth decay is not treated, it can affect learning, speech and how your child's adult teeth grow. The MLHU's Oral Health Team traditionally visits your child's school. Children in JK, SK, and Grade 2 are eligible for a FREE dental screening by a Registered Dental Hygienist, with parental permission. This program could be impacted by COVID-19 for the upcoming 2021-22 school year.

Please note: Dental screening does not replace a regular check-up by your child's dentist.

If you have a concern about your child's teeth, please call 519-663-5317 to book an appointment for free dental screening at the Middlesex-London Health Unit.

For more information about free dental services for children under the age of 17, please visit: www.healthunit.com/healthy-smiles-ontario



Vision Screening Program



Take advantage of a free eye examination to rule out vision concerns for your child.

Eye examinations are covered once a year by provincial health insurance for people under 20. Eye problems can go unnoticed because kids often don't know when they are not seeing well. Call your local optometrist to find out more information.



The **Eye See...Eye Learn® Program** provides a free pair of eyeglasses to children born in 2017 and entering JK in 2021.

Please visit www.eyeseeeyelearn.ca for more information about this program and to book an appointment with an Eye See... Eye Learn® participating optometrist between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022.

Physical Activity

Physical activity fuels healthy growth and development. Children learn better when they spend time running, jumping, and playing outdoors every day. It also helps them to sleep and feel better.

Plan activities such as: bike riding; running; skipping; climbing on playground equipment; dancing; and kicking a ball as these activities cause children to breathe harder and break a sweat. These activities also help your child learn movement skills that they need to be active.

Physical activity and active play may look different this year at school due to COVID-19. At this time, it is not known what the physical activity and active play component will look like when school starts this fall. However, it is still important to maintain an active lifestyle with your child at home.

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth gives recommendations on the amount of physical activity, sleep, sitting and screen time needed for good health. For more information see: www.participation.com



Packing Lunches for School

A healthy school lunch can give children the energy and nutrients they need to learn and play and take on the second half of the day! When planning lunches, keep these tips in mind:

- Plan your meals, including lunches and snacks, ahead for the week.
- Make lunches “kid” friendly. Use containers that can be easily opened by your child.
- Check-in about the amounts you are sending and adjust quantity as needed.



Rather than buying costly pre-made lunch kits, make your own healthy lunch kit. Pack a reusable multi-compartment container with bite-sized cheese cubes, left over pieces of chicken, whole grain cereal, veggie sticks or fruit slices. To make veggies more appealing, offer hummus or other dips. Add variety by choosing different types of whole grains (bread, rolls, pitas, tortillas) to give sandwiches a twist.

- Involve your kids. Children who help make their lunch are more likely to eat it. Even small children can help decide between two different veggie or fruit choices and pack crackers into reusable containers.
- Plan lunches that include vegetables, fruit, protein foods (like hummus, eggs, milk, yogurt, fish or chicken) and whole grains

(like whole grain cereals, crackers, breads or wraps).

- Make water your child’s “go to drink”. A reusable water bottle will help to keep your child hydrated all day. Plain white milk or plain fortified soy beverage packed in a thermos also make a good choice.
- Pack lunches in an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack to keep cold foods cold.
- Keep hot foods hot by using a thermos.
- Clean the inside of the lunch bag each day.

For more information visit:

www.unlockfood.ca/en/default.aspx

Nutri-eSTEP®

Are you a parent or caregiver with a young child?

Do you want to know how your child is doing with daily habits?

Nutri-eSTEP® is a fast and simple way to find out if your preschooler (3 to 5 years) is a healthy eater and to get feedback.

How does Nutri-eSTEP® work?

1. Visit www.nutritionscreen.ca and select the preschooler questionnaire.
2. Answer 17 short NutriSTEP® questions about your child’s eating and activity habits – it takes less than 10 minutes.
3. Get immediate personalized feedback!

Starting School During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Mental Well-Being

It is normal for both children and their parents to be anxious about a child's first day of school, especially during a pandemic. Here are some tips from Dr. Robin Williams, at the Canadian Pediatric Society, to help you prepare.

✓ **Be calm, but realistic.**

- Children are very sensitive to any anxiety parents may be feeling, even if we think we hide it well.
- Practice and model healthy self-care strategies.
- Seek information from trusted sources, such as your healthcare provider and www.healthunit.com/covid-19-schools

✓ **Talk to your child.**

- Ask them what they are thinking.
- Don't assume. They may want less information than you think.
- Encourage them to be curious and ask questions.
- Correct false information.

✓ **Teach them the necessary skills to feel safe.**

- Handwashing
- Coughing or sneezing into their elbow
- Physical distancing
- Wearing a mask
- Involve them in simple cleaning tasks so they start to understand about "germs" on objects that are touched often by a variety of people.

✓ **Choices**

- Give them limited choice to help them feel some control; such as, "Which colour mask do you want to wear today, the purple or the green?"

✓ **Media**

- Limit media exposure. This will improve your mental health too!

✓ **Prioritize family time!**

- Go outside!
- Be active!
- Laugh!
- Create!
- Play...everyone will benefit!

✓ **Most importantly...be patient!**

- Your child has spent more than a year being isolated from most other children their age.
- Many young children have had little opportunity to practice their social skills.
- Expect some struggles and be prepared to accept and talk about "big feelings"; here are some suggestions from Sick Kids Hospital www.sickkidscmh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Big-Feelings-Final-May-2020.pdf

For more information about school readiness: www.healthunit.com/ready-for-school