

For Immediate Release | September 17, 2009

## Back to School is More than Pencils, Books and Paper

Going back to school means getting back to routines. During the summer, kids get lots of active, unplanned play and may sleep at different times than during the school year. Once school starts, parents can help make it easier for their children to make a smooth adjustment to a new schedule.

“We know that children who eat well, get plenty of sleep and are active, perform better in school,” says Dr. Paul Hasselback, Medical Health Officer with Interior Health. “Parents can help children adjust by continuing to include activity in their child’s schedule, getting back to regular sleeping patterns and providing lots of healthy snacks and lunches to supply fuel for their growing brains and bodies.”

Interior Health offers these tips to help your child ease into some new and healthy routines during the school season.

### Healthy lunches your kids will actually eat

We’ve all been there as parents – you pack your child a healthy lunch in the morning, and then you find it in the bottom of their backpack when they get home! So, how can you create interesting, healthy meals that your child will enjoy?

Try these tips:

- Let your kids help pick their food from a healthy selection at home, then use these foods to plan your grocery shopping. Remember to offer foods from all four food groups in Canada’s Food Guide (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>) that includes veggies and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives.
- Get them to help make and pack their lunch the day before, when possible – kids love to eat what they helped make.
- Cut sandwiches into shapes your child likes – triangles, squares or special shapes on occasions such as Valentines Day.

### Stay active to help manage back to school stress

We often think of stress as an adult issue, but children can also experience stress or anxiety about going back to school; whether it’s starting a new school, entering a new grade, or just the thought of all that homework.

There are things you can do to help your kids manage stress:

- Talk with your children about how they feel about going back to school, and reassure them that it is normal and okay to feel nervous.
- Ensure your child gets 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night.
- Encourage unstructured playtime.
- Stay active – children and youth need about 90 minutes of physical activity every day. It can be done in shorter periods of five minutes each or longer.

### Wash up to stop the spread of germs

Back to school also marks the start of cold and flu season – and germs that can be easily spread between classmates.

To keep your kids healthy:

- Teach and practice frequent handwashing with warm water and soap for at least 15 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Keep children home from school if they aren't feeling well. If you or your child is sick, cough and sneeze into a tissue or your elbow, and continue to wash your hands.
- Make sure your child gets all of their recommended immunizations.

September is a busy time, but it doesn't have to be a stressful one. By following the above tips, your children can successfully transition into a healthy and fun routine that will help them succeed this school year.

For more information on school health, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca) ([http://www.interiorhealth.ca/school\\_health.aspx](http://www.interiorhealth.ca/school_health.aspx)).