



E-Bulletin

Special Issue



Issue 53

September 2013

The E - Bulletin is a service provided from the in-house team of physicians (Specialists, GP's & the In-house Training Center) at the **CEDARS – Jebel Ali International Hospital** in order to raise awareness about health issues.

Back to School Health Tips

In preparing for your child's return to school, parents should review their child's health status, just as they check their clothes and school supplies. To succeed in school, children need to be healthy, alert and able to see properly .

1. Check with your doctor to confirm that your child has received the recommended vaccinations.

The single most important health issue for younger children is to make sure they receive their recommended vaccinations. It is particularly important that all eligible members of the household receive the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine in order to create a 'wall of immunity' around the family. Whooping cough can be a particularly serious infection for young infants, leading to hospitalization and occasionally death. Children can begin to receive pertussis vaccine, in the form of DTaP, at age 2 months. Because immunity can fade over time, children over age 7 years, adolescents and adults should be re-vaccinated against pertussis to keep their immunity strong. Both these vaccines also protect against tetanus and diphtheria. The vaccine's trade name is BOOSTRIX.

In addition, everyone over 6 months of age should receive a yearly influenza vaccine. Influenza can be severe and unpredictable. This year's vaccine will contain protection against Influenza A H1N1 (pandemic strain), H3N2 and Influenza B. Children age 9 years and younger, who have never received influenza vaccine before will need two doses, four weeks apart, for full protection.

In addition, be sure children are vaccinated for common infectious diseases such as chicken-pox, Measles (as MMR) and Meningococcal Infections. To see a list of recommended vaccinations for different age groups, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers parents an online immunization chart.



2. Get a complete eye exam before your child starts school.

Remember, 80 percent of the learning occurs through the eyes and approximately one in four school-age children have some type of vision impairment. School eye exams, while valuable, are necessarily brief and may miss many treatable problems.

Every child should have a complete eye exam by age three. Some serious eye diseases such as Amblyopia (lazy eye) or strabismus (crossed eyes) are correctable with eye patches or surgery if caught early. Once a child is seven or eight years old, the opportunity to correct the problem may be lost, resulting in permanent vision problems.



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Health tips *cont...*

3. Be sure your child wears a properly fitted bicycle helmet.

Head injuries accounted for 63 percent of all bicycle fatalities. Children under 18 wear a helmet when they are riding a bicycle, scooter or skateboard. If a child has an accident, a helmet can prevent a serious brain injury. The helmet should be comfortable but fit snugly.

4. Snacks: plan them, don't ban them.

A study of 700,000 children published in the March 2010 edition of the Journal of Pediatrics found that 37 percent were overweight and 19.4 percent were obese. Childhood obesity is a major health issue. Being overweight may impact a child's self-esteem, school performance, and physical health. Over time, obesity increases the risk of many diseases, including heart disease, stroke, arthritis, diabetes and cancer.

By shopping carefully, parents can get their children started in healthy eating habits. Snacking itself is not necessarily bad; young children actually need snacks. Their stomachs are small, so they often can't get all the nutrients they need in a day through regular meals alone. Avoid soda drinks and salty, high-calorie pre-packaged snack foods. Provide milk or juice and servings of fruit or vegetables instead. Each 12-ounce soft drink can contain approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar. Drinking just one can of soda a day increases a child's risk of obesity by 60 percent, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

5. Get started early with a school bedtime schedule.

During the summer, many children fall into a vacation rhythm, staying up late and sleep late at night. Sleep specialists recommend that parents start gradually imposing an earlier bedtime several weeks before school begins. While there is a lot of variation between individuals, children need more sleep than adults. Recent studies indicate children ages 6 through 9 should get 10 to 11 hours of sleep a night. If your child is not getting enough sleep, it may fall asleep in the car or seem tired during the day.

Some children need help establishing bedtime rituals that make them comfortable and drowsy. Parents need to set a regular bedtime and keep it to build consistency in the child's daily routine.

6. Watch out for back pain caused by backpacks.

Parents need to keep an eye out to be sure children are not having back pain as a result of carrying a backpack to school. While there is no clear evidence that heavy backpacks lead to permanent damage, they are associated with back pain in children. Poor conditioning may contribute to back pain, so parents are encouraged to get their children to do core strengthening exercises to build muscle strength.

In addition, parents should look for packs with individual compartments and put heaviest items closest to the body. Sharp objects like pencils should be in smaller pockets on the outside. School back packs should have two shoulder straps and your child should use both.

7. Car safety remains a top priority.

September brings an increase in car trips to school, lessons and sports practices. Despite airbags, motor vehicle accidents remain a leading cause of death for children. Many of the patients seen in Emergency Department who were injured in traffic accidents were not wearing seat belts. All passengers should wear a seat belt or an age-appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.

8. Have a family plan for sick days.

Never send your child to school with a fever. Even if your child says it feels ok, running a fever is an indicator that their immune system is trying to fight off something. When a child is running a fever, it is contagious and puts children and adults around at risk. If possible, make arrangements for your child to stay home with caregiver.

Keep your child at home until the fever has been gone for 24 hours without medication. Colds can be contagious for at least 48 hours. If you're unsure about the best way to treat your child's cold or flu, ask your doctor, school nurse or other healthcare provider.



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9. Fight germs with hand washing and home cleanliness.

Regular hand washing is one of the single best ways to fight infection. Younger children should be instructed in the importance of proper hand washing before eating and after using the restroom. For situations where hand washing is not possible, consider supplying your child with packets of hand sanitizing gel.

Germs and viruses can hitch a ride back home from school, so regular cleaning of kitchen and bathroom counters is a good idea. Basic washing of frequently used hard surfaces with cleanser or soap will go a long way towards lowering the germ count.

10. Talk with your children to understand their emotions.

Parental responsibility goes beyond supplying food, clothing and entertainment. Parents are also responsible for their child's emotional and social growth. It is important for parents to consistently talk to their children, to know their personalities and be alert to any changes in behaviour.

To maintain a strong connection engage with your kids consistently, make a point to spend time with them daily and talk about their activities and interests. Listen to what they say. Let them know you are interested in what they think and how they feel. Let them know they can always feel comfortable talking to you.

It's important to be aware of what is appropriate behaviour for your child's age group. Good sources for this information are teachers and other parents. Remember you can ask teachers or school counsellors for help or input if you have questions or are concerned about changes in your child's behaviour. ❖

**Medical Consultant for this special issue**

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Dr. Ziaul Akhter has more than 25 years of hospital and teaching experience as a consultant in Pediatrics and new born (Neonatology) care. Currently, he is the head of Pediatrics Department at CEDARS – Jebel Ali International Hospital.

After obtaining his MD (Pediatrics) in India, Dr. Zia had the privilege to work in prestigious medical institution in India like Holy Family and Christian Medical College. He also has 14 years of extensive experience in Saudi Arabia in the Ministry of Health as Specialist Pediatrician in the field of General Pediatrics and Neonatology.

His special interests are respiratory/allergic problem in children, infant feeding practices, new born care and children vaccinations.

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