



For Immediate Release:

September 7, 2010

It's Back to School for LA County

Public Health offers parents tips on keeping young students safe and healthy

LOS ANGELES – With the start of the school year just around the corner, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has tips on how to keep your child safe and healthy so that they can focus on their studies and thrive, both at home and school.

“If you teach children healthy habits now, they will stick with those habits long-term,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Give your kids the head-start they need to live long, healthy and productive lives.”

Stop Disease in its Tracks: Vaccinate!

School season means that your child will come into contact with hundreds of other children daily, providing them plenty of opportunity to pick up whatever illnesses are going around. Teach your children healthy habits, such as washing their hands before eating and after using the restroom, and covering their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Make sure that their vaccinations are up-to-date.

“Right now, a big concern is pertussis, also known as ‘whooping cough,’” Dr. Fielding said. “Statewide, the numbers of pertussis cases have reached epidemic levels, and it is important that children and those that care for them, including teachers, aides, school officials, and adults at home, are appropriately protected against this vaccine-preventable disease.”

In addition to the usual series of childhood pertussis vaccinations, the California Department of Public Health now recommends an adolescent-adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) for:

- anyone 7 years and older who is not fully immunized, including those who are more than 64 years old
- women of childbearing age
- anyone who cares for infants, particularly those under 3 months of age

Flu and cold season will also begin shortly. This year’s flu vaccine will include protection against H1N1 and other flu strains that are likely to start circulating in schools and elsewhere. Influenza can cause students, teachers and others to miss important days of school and work and, in some cases, can lead to serious complications for those who become sick. While colds are not as serious as influenza and there is no vaccine against colds, the chance of catching or giving a cold is reduced by hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.

Residents are encouraged to first contact their regular doctor for recommended vaccinations. Those who do not have a regular healthcare provider or insurance coverage for vaccines can call



the LA County Information line at 2-1-1 or visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip> for referrals to providers and community sites offering free or low-cost immunizations.

Everyone should practice these healthy habits to help prevent the spread of any illness:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before eating.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs are spread more easily through these areas.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or with your sleeve.
- Stay home from work, school or daycare if you or your child is sick.

After-School Snacks can be Healthy

People who eat regular meals, beginning with a healthy breakfast, are less likely to overeat and gain weight than people who skip meals. Healthy snacks should be incorporated into a child's diet as a way to satisfy the hunger of a growing child, and to provide the vitamins and nutrients a body needs.

“Many people incorrectly believe that snacking is a bad thing,” Dr. Fielding said. “But if you're careful about how much and what you eat, snacking can be a key component to a healthy diet.”

Healthy Snacking Ideas:

- Plan snacks as part of the day's menu by offering them at regular times, such as mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Children and adults should avoid nibbling constantly throughout the day, but a planned snack break can provide energy and nutrition, and help prevent binge eating or less healthy food choices.
- Some suggested “kid-friendly” fruit and veggie snacks include: adding peanut butter and raisins to celery sticks, dipping graham crackers or gingersnaps in applesauce, freezing fresh, unsweetened 100% fruit juice in popsicle molds, or serving frozen bananas with a small amount of cheddar cheese.
- Make healthy substitutions by trading in ice cream for frozen grapes, chips for pretzels, or a cup of low fat yogurt instead of a candy bar.
- When shopping at a grocery store or farmers' market, let children help pick out fruits and vegetables for snacks. They will be more interested in eating these foods if they have been involved in selecting them.
- Snacks are a good way to introduce new fruits and vegetables. Include a game or activity to learn about the new food and its nutritional value, and let the child help prepare the snack.

Stay Active, but Stay Safe

Many parents allow their children to walk or ride a bicycle to school, which can be a great way for them to get exercise. However, it is important to teach kids about pedestrian and bicycle safety before turning them loose on their own. From 2004 to 2006, there were 16 children (ages 5-11) killed in pedestrian accidents, and 1,824 children were injured.



There are “rules of the road” for pedestrians, just as there are for motorists. Take the time to make sure your children understand these potentially life-saving rules:

- Pedestrians are to use sidewalks whenever they are safely available.
- When sidewalks are unavailable, pedestrians must walk facing traffic as far to the left as possible.
- Pedestrians must obey traffic signals and/or traffic officers.
- At crosswalks where there isn't a traffic control signal or officer, pedestrians have the right-of-way.
- If there are not any crosswalks, signs or signals, the pedestrian must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles.
- Regardless of the right-of-way, the driver is required by law to take great care to avoid “hitting” pedestrians.

You can help make it safer to walk to your local school by:

- Adopt a Walk to School Week campaign at your child’s school to help increase pedestrian safety awareness. For more information, go to: <http://www.walktoschool.org/>.
- Start a walking school bus. Talk to other parents at your school and encourage a group of children to walk to school with one or more adults.

Between 2004 and 2006, three children were killed in bicycling accidents, and 915 children were injured. “These tragic deaths and injuries are, in most cases, preventable,” Dr. Fielding said. “Ride with the flow of traffic, stay visible, and-if your child is under the age of 9-be sure they ride on a sidewalk. And always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.”

For more information on pedestrian and bicycle safety, please visit the LA County Public Health Injury and Violence Prevention Program website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ivpp>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

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