

# How to start the school year strong and prevent illness in children

July 29 2024, by David M. Higgins, MD, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics

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The excitement of a new school year unfolds each year when families flood the superstore aisles to buy classroom supplies, tape after-school

schedules on the fridge and organize carpools with friends.

Common to each family is a desire for [children](#) to remain healthy, active and ready to learn.

To prepare children and [teens](#) to be at their best—physically, mentally, socially and emotionally—the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends regular visits to the pediatrician, as well as immunizations that help keep all family members healthy. Recent outbreaks of [measles](#), a highly contagious disease, have shown how quickly some [infectious diseases](#) can spread within a community.

The best way to strengthen a child's immune system and keep him or her healthy is through vaccinations. An illness like measles can keep children home and away from school and activities for days. Immunizations allow children to enjoy learning, playing and getting together with friends and family.

As of June 13, a total of 151 U.S. measles cases were reported in 2024 in 21 different states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These recent measles outbreaks have affected unvaccinated people. Choosing to not vaccinate your children not only leaves them susceptible to measles, but also exposes other children to this potentially serious disease. This includes infants who are too young to be vaccinated and those who are unable to be vaccinated due to other health conditions.

Everyone in our community deserves to be healthy, and part of being healthy means getting immunized for all illnesses, including influenza and COVID-19 and, if eligible, [respiratory syncytial virus](#) (RSV). It benefits all of us if every child in our community is vaccinated, because it means that all of us are more likely to be healthy.

Families can also stop the spread of infection by encouraging [hand](#)

washing with children throughout the day. Help or remind them to wash their hands:

- Before eating (including snacks)
- After a trip to the bathroom
- Whenever they come in from playing outdoors
- After touching an animal, like a family pet
- After sneezing or coughing if they cover their mouth
- When someone in the household is ill

The AAP calls for the immunization of all children and adolescents according to its policy, Recommended Immunization Schedules for Children and Adolescents Aged 18 Years or Younger, United States.

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