

Back to School, Back to the Doctor



Information for Your Patients

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Gaps in care Outreach topic:

****Back to School Wellness Visits**

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Back-to-school check-ups, as they are commonly called, are often the only visit most kids and teenagers have with their pediatrician every year. The annual physical gives the pediatrician a chance to give the child a thorough physical exam and address any emotional, developmental, or social concerns. It is also a good chance to address important questions, especially with teenagers, including adolescent issues of drinking, smoking, drugs, sexual activity, and depression.

Children involved in school athletic programs often receive a sports-specific exam through the school. The timeframe for getting this exam should be at least 6 weeks prior to the start of the sport's season. This allows ample time to work up any new health concerns or rehab any lingering injuries before the season starts, without delaying clearance of the athlete. However, school sports physicals alone tend not to address the child's overall health.

Building a Medical History

The continuity of regular physical exams is invaluable. Having a long-term history with a child or adolescent gives the doctor the awareness of the child's progress and development over time. This helps the doctor detect emerging problems, as well as being informed by the detail of the patient's history, such as important past illnesses or injuries the child may forget to mention on the sports physical questionnaire.

That detail includes immunization records. A school entry form will generally include a check box asking whether all vaccinations are up-to-date, requiring the parents to remember whether or not they are. The family pediatrician will have accurate records to assist you in filling out these forms.

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