

# A Healthy Start to School

A guide for parents of children in foundation year



## **Translations**

The Healthy Start to School booklet is also available for download in Arabic (pdf), Dari (pdf), Simplified-Chinese (pdf), Turkish (pdf), Urdu (pdf), and Vietnamese (pdf)

## **We need your help**

We want to improve this booklet and we would like to hear your stories and tips for the new foundation parents and carers of the future. Please take a minute to provide feedback.

Produced by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education and Training, State Government of Victoria

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This work is available at: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthystarttoschool](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthystarttoschool).

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# Healthy children learn better

Congratulations! You and your child have begun an exciting new adventure.

As with any big change, starting primary school brings a new set of routines, challenges and rewards.

Making this transition a happy, healthy one can have some real benefits down the track. A positive start to school can establish a child's readiness to learn and confidence about other big transitions in life.

And, importantly, **healthy children learn better**.

This is also the start of an important partnership between you and your child's school in supporting your child's physical, social and emotional health, now and throughout their school years.

The purpose of this booklet is to:

- provide parents and carers of foundation kids with some timely health information
- give you an overview of the role of the school when it comes to your child's health
- point you towards more detailed information or contacts for areas of special interest to you and your family.

We encourage you to make use of the contents page and index to find the information that's important to you, and keep this booklet handy for future reference – you never know what's around the corner in your school adventure!

We wish you a healthy, happy school year.



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# Keeping healthy



“ I found that when I got Jane to help with making her lunches she was more likely to return an empty lunch box at the end of the day! ”

*Catherine, Jane's mum*

## Healthy eating

The food your child eats at school can have a major influence on their eating habits and preferences, growth, energy, concentration levels and ability to learn. When schools and families work together to promote healthy eating habits, it can have a life-long positive impact on children's growth, development and health.

### What schools do

The *School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy* and supporting resources guide schools to provide a healthy school food service and to develop a whole-school approach to healthy eating.

A whole-school approach to healthy eating is supported and recognised by the Achievement Program.

The Healthy Eating Advisory Service offers advice, resources and menu assessments to assist schools with the supply of foods and drinks in-line with the *School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy*.

## What parents can do

### Breakfast is important

Nutritious food in the morning helps your child to stay active and concentrate at school. Be a positive role model and let your child see you eat a nutritious breakfast too. A bowl of high fibre, low-sugar cereal with milk and fresh or stewed fruit is a great starter for the whole family. Choose breakfast cereals with at least 4g of fibre per 100g and less than 5g of sugar per 100g such as rolled oats or untoasted muesli.

### School lunches – foods and drinks to include

A packed lunch from home is a great way for your child to learn about healthy foods and drinks. Stick to fresh, unprocessed foods as much as possible, and water or a small carton of milk (frozen in the warmer months). For a healthy lunchbox, include something from each of the five food groups, as well as water.

**For practical ideas for a nutritious school lunchbox, print out our *Pick & Mix 1–6* poster and keep it on your fridge as a quick and handy reference.**

### School lunches – foods and drinks to limit

Sweet drinks and highly processed, sugary, fatty and salty foods should only make up a very small part of your child's diet. Avoid confectionery (including chocolate), crisps and sweet drinks in school lunches.

Many supermarkets have products that seem conveniently packed and are marketed as 'healthy' for school lunches, but sweet drinks, biscuits, snack bars, fruit straps, chips and other products can be high in sugar, salt and fat. Compare the 'per 100 grams' column of the nutrition information panel and go with products that have the least sugar, fat and salt.

### A special note on birthday celebrations

*Many families like to celebrate children's birthdays at school by providing something for the class to share. This can mean quite a regular supply of lollies and cupcakes! Don't feel you need to send a birthday treat in, as often the teacher will have fun and creative ways planned to acknowledge children's birthdays, such as performing a class song or a special badge to wear.*

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### Finding out more

- Better Health Channel – **Lunch boxes – menu planner**
  - Department of Education and Training – **Healthy Eating – School Food Services**
  - **Achievement Program**
  - **Healthy Eating Advisory Service**
-



*Caleb and his little brother got scooters for Christmas before Caleb started school and it's turned out to be the best way to get him out of the house. The only problem was me keeping up with him, so my wife got me a scooter for my birthday in March and now it's something we all do together!*

*Darren, Caleb's dad*

## Physical activity and active play

Foundation kids have lots of energy, and need time outdoors to burn it off. Being physically active is great for helping your child think, concentrate and solve problems. Active play, at home and at school is an important part of children's development.

### What the experts say

*For primary school children, **at least** 60 minutes of activity is recommended each day and no more than two hours of screen time, for example watching TV or playing computer games. Break up long periods of sitting as often as possible.*

### What schools do

Physical education is timetabled for all students from foundation to year 10. Through physical education and school sport, children learn to move with skill and confidence as well as learning about the value of practice, setting goals, meeting challenges, teamwork and being fair.

In addition to this structured activity, break times during the school day provide opportunities for active play. Play times are an important part of your child's day at school because it develops their:

- imagination and creativity
- problem-solving skills
- social skills, including learning to get along with others and resolving conflict
- physical skills, including coordination, balance, and flexibility
- talking, listening skills and confidence

- understanding of others and the ability to accept difference
- understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

## What parents can do

Encourage your child's interest in active play. Children who enjoy sports and physical activities tend to stay active throughout their lives. Staying active can help improve self-esteem, maintain a healthy weight and decrease the risk of serious illnesses later in life. Some ways to do this include:

- Be active as a family; this will get everyone moving and kids love to play with their parents.
- Try incorporating physical activity into your daily routine, for example walking, riding or scooting to school, or walking the dog with your child after school or after dinner each night.
- Allow enough time for active play. Children burn off energy, develop their coordination and usually have fun when left to their own devices. They will probably play actively without too much intervention on your part.
- Take advantage of local playgrounds, sports fields or school grounds for games or physical activity, especially if you don't have a lot of space at home.
- Ensure children always wear a correctly fitted and fastened helmet when skating or riding a bicycle, skateboard or scooter to and from school.
- Of course, it is important to make sure your child is in a safe and secure environment, but this doesn't mean you have to be there every time your child plays. While it is fun and important to play with your child, it is also important to encourage their independence.

## A special note on injuries at school

*As you have likely experienced, active children sometimes sustain injuries. If your child is injured at school, schools are equipped with first aid facilities and trained staff who can assess and act on the situation, and, if necessary, you will be quickly contacted.*

## Finding out more

- Better Health Channel – **Children – keeping them active and Child safety and injury prevention**
- Department of Education and Training – **First aid**
- Kidsafe Victoria – **Information on child safety**
- Information on **walk or ride to school**, visit VicHealth's **[www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au](http://www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au)** or **Bicycle Network**





“ We sometimes noticed that Barnaby would rub his eyes a lot, and a few times he just couldn't seem to see things far away. But with kids it can be really hard to tell. I wrote this down on the health questionnaire anyway and I'm so glad I did because the primary school nurse did a vision assessment, and it turned out he needs glasses. I'm so glad we found out early and not further down the track. ”

*Hazel, Barnaby's mum*

## Growth and physical development

Childhood is an important time to establish eating, activity and sleep patterns to support healthy growth and physical development.

### What schools do

The **Primary School Nursing Program** identifies children with potential health related learning difficulties and responds to your concerns about your child's health and wellbeing. Primary school nurses visit foundation children at school throughout their first year of school to provide health assessments, information and advice about healthy behaviours.

Your child's school will give you the **School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ)** to complete during the first year. You will be asked to provide information about your child's health history and any concerns you have about your child's health and development.

### What parents can do

- Complete and return the School Entrant Health Questionnaire.
- If you have any concerns about your child's health and wellbeing, raise these through the SEHQ or discuss them with your child's teacher and/or your family doctor throughout the year.

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### Finding out more

- Department of Education and Training – **Primary School Nursing Program**
  - Better Health Channel – **Growth and development – primary school children**
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“ Benjamin was so tired when he started school even though he was having shorter days than when he was at day care. I think the effort of holding himself together and following new rules really wore him out at the beginning. ”

*Bruce, Benjamin's dad*

## Sleep

Children are usually tired after school, especially at the beginning of the school year. They need about 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night from around 7:30 pm. Getting a good night's sleep helps your child to be ready for school the next day and keeps them healthy by strengthening their immune system.

### What parents can do

A bedtime routine is very important. It helps kids wind down at the end of the day and settles them before going to sleep. Things to try:

- Put them to bed and get them up at the same time each day. Predictability helps children feel secure.
- Help your child to wind down about an hour before bedtime. Turn off the television and electronic devices, and encourage quiet activities. Reading to or with them can really help. It's a good idea not to allow electronic devices and screens in bedrooms.
- Quietly chatting about what happened during their day at school will also help your child to express any events or worries they may have before going to sleep.
- If they are not sleeping well, ask yourself if they are getting enough exercise.
- If not, do what you can to tire them out!

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### Finding out more

- [Department of Education and Training – Maintaining healthy sleep patterns](#)
-



*“Khrista lost her first tooth at school. Her teacher sent it home in an envelope with a note saying it prompted a whole class discussion about dentists.”*

*Pradheep,  
Khrista's dad*

## Teeth and oral health

The first years of school are often filled with wobbly teeth! Most children will start losing their baby teeth from around the time they turn six. Usually, by the time they are 12 years old they will have all their adult teeth, except for their wisdom teeth.

### What schools do

Schools can provide you with information on how your child can access Victoria's public dental services.

### What parents can do

By now, your child is probably already brushing their own teeth, though they may still need your help. Help your child brush their teeth until you are sure they can do it well by themselves. This is usually from seven to eight years of age.

When your child's adult teeth start coming through, you should:

- allow the loose baby tooth to fall out on its own. If you try and pull a baby tooth before it's ready to fall out, it can snap and this can lead to infection.
- maintain your child's teeth-brushing routine. They should brush their teeth every morning and every night with a soft brush and appropriate fluoride toothpaste, being gentle around any loose baby teeth. After brushing they should spit out toothpaste, not swallow it or rinse with water.

**Children who participate in contact sports should wear a dental-approved mouthguard (available from pharmacies).**

### Dental checks

Every child has different oral health needs. Talk with your dentist about how often your child should have a dental check-up. All children under 12 years old are eligible for Victoria's public dental services, which provides check-ups, advice and treatments through the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne and community-based dental clinics.

Children aged 2–17 years old in families that are eligible for Family Tax Benefit A can also access dental services through the Australian Government's Child Dental Benefits Schedule. Medicare has more information about the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

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### Finding out more

- To find your nearest community dental clinic, visit **Dental Health Services Victoria**
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*“We live pretty close to the school so I walk Lilah and Charlie there, and I usually take our neighbour’s two kids too. They’ve made a real game out of the ‘stop, listen, look, think’ thing – they take turns shouting it out whenever we get to a corner. It can get loud!”*

*Karen, Lilah and Charlie’s mum*

## Getting to school

Walking, scooting and cycling to school establishes excellent everyday habits in young children and builds lifelong road safety awareness. Increasing physical activity contributes to better academic performance at school. It is also beneficial for the environment, reduces traffic congestion and saves on parking.

Walking to school with your child is a great way to talk and meet up with other families. It is also a perfect opportunity to teach road safety and traffic smarts to your child, until they have the necessary skills to walk on their own.

Each child develops differently, however, parents should be aware that the skills and physical abilities needed to get to school by themselves are often not developed until late in primary school. There are a number of programs already operating that support kids getting to school using active transport such as the VicHealth Walk to School month and Ride2School

## What schools do

Together with parents and carers, schools share responsibility for supporting children to become responsible passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and eventually, drivers. Traffic safety education is incorporated into the school curriculum.

## What parents can do

### Teach them to Stop. Look. Listen. Think.

Walking, scooting and cycling to school with your child is a great way to start the day and reinforce road safety awareness in your child. Children under the age of 12 are allowed to ride on footpaths and so can adults riding with them. At road crossings, reinforce school lessons by asking your child to:

- STOP one step back from the road
- LOOK in all directions for approaching traffic
- LISTEN in all directions for approaching traffic
- THINK about whether it is safe to cross the road – when the road is clear or all traffic has stopped. When crossing, walk straight across the road. Keep looking and listening for traffic while crossing.

## Be wary at pick-ups and drop-offs

Keep everyone safe at busy times at the school by:

- respecting the speed limits and parking signs around the school
- remembering children do unpredictable things – they may not be aware of you so you need to be aware of them
- letting your child know that if you're running a few minutes late picking them up, they should stay in the school playground or office, with a teacher until you arrive.

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## Finding out more

- [VicRoads – Improving safety around our schools](#)
  - [Department of Education and Training – Travelling to School](#)
  - [Bicycle Network – Ride2School](#)
  - [VicHealth – Walk to school month](#)
  - [Kidsafe Victoria – Information on child safety](#)
-



*“We were having trouble remembering everything we had to pack every day for school, so we have a big list on Emily’s wall, which has ‘hat’ at the top every day!”*  
Karin, Emily’s mum

## Sun protection

Too much of the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) radiation can lead to skin cancer. Not enough sun exposure can contribute to Vitamin D deficiency; a vitamin essential for developing strong muscles and bones. It is important to find a healthy balance. UV radiation isn’t like the sun’s heat, which we feel, or light, which we see. UV levels can be high enough to damage skin on cool or cloudy days.

### What schools do

- A sun and UV protection policy guides schools to use a combination of sun protection measures during the daily sun protection times issued whenever UV levels reach three or more (typically from mid-August to the end of April in Victoria).
- Schools are not closed on days of extreme heat (or heavy rain), however, in extreme weather conditions (for example, during heatwaves), recess and dismissal times may be adjusted.

### What parents can do

- The sun protection times for your local area tell you when to protect your skin. Sun protection times can be found at the **Bureau of Meteorology** website. Check these times each day to know whether sun protection is needed. Alternatively, **download the free SunSmart app** and receive notifications once the UV index exceeds the safe limit.
- Teach by example and reinforce the sun safe habits. During the sun protection times, **slip** on sun-protective clothing, **slop** on SPF 30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, **slap** on a broad-brimmed hat, **seek** shade and **slide** on sunglasses.

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### Finding out more

- [Get the free SunSmart UV alert app](#)
  - [Department of Education and Training – Sun and UV Protection](#)
  - [Better Health Channel – Skin cancer – children](#)
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## Extreme heat

Extreme heat can affect anybody, but those most at risk are aged 65 and over, especially if they are isolated, babies and young children, and people with pre-existing medical conditions. During extreme heat it is easy to become dehydrated or for your body to overheat. If this happens, you may develop heat cramps, heat exhaustion or heatstroke. Heatstroke is a medical emergency which can result in permanent damage to vital organs or even death. Extreme heat can also make existing medical conditions worse.

### What schools do

- The heat health policy aims to ensure schools have measures in place to prepare for and manage the risks associated with extreme hot weather.
- Schools must be able to recognise and treat heat related illness and have strategies to manage prolonged periods of extreme heat.

### What parents can do

- On hot days, make sure children drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Avoid sugary drinks.
- Dress them in light, loose fitting clothing.
- If you are breastfeeding, feed your baby as often as they need during hot weather. This may be more often than usual.
- Never leave your baby or child in a car – regardless of the temperature and even with the air conditioning on. The temperature in a car can double within minutes.
- Let your children sleep in the coolest room in the house. Make sure air can circulate around them – for example, by removing any bedding and padding around the cot.
- Sick children need special attention in hot weather. Even minor illnesses, such as colds can lead to a slight rise in temperature which can lead to dehydration.
- Consider using ice packs in lunch boxes to keep lunches cool and safe to eat on hot days.

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### Finding out more

- [Better Health Channel – Hot weather and child safety](#)
  - [Subscribe to receive heat health alerts](#)
  - [Better Health Channel – Survive the heat](#)
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# Social and emotional development



“When Zahid started school he only knew one other girl, who he had gone to daycare with. The teacher sat them together at the start so they didn’t feel alone and he has made lots of new friends since.”

Aman, Zahid’s dad

## Resilience

The word ‘resilience’ is used to describe a person’s ability to cope, adapt, learn and thrive in the face of change, challenge or adversity. While some children find it harder than others, all children can develop positive coping strategies that will benefit them their whole lives.

### What schools do

Your school will support your child to learn valuable life skills, such as building relationships, seeking help, and making decisions. The school environment provides children with lots of chances to learn and grow as people. At primary school they can learn to understand and assert themselves, get along with others, face challenges, make friends and deal with conflict – all personal skills they will need as teenagers and adults.



## What parents can do

Parents and carers can help their children to build resilience by:

- making home a safe and happy place
- praising your child for good behaviour
- setting clear rules and sticking to them
- behaving how you would like your children to behave in your relationships with friends and family
- making special time to talk with and listen to your child – this lets them know they are valued and important people.

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## Finding out more

- [Department of Education and Training – Building Resilience](#)
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## Making friends

Starting school can be an anxious time for your child with new rules, a new teacher and *lots of new children*. Some children make new friends easily, while others take a while to warm up. Both types are normal.

## What schools do

Your child's teacher has an important role to play in supporting children to make friends. Teachers can identify which children are chatty, confident and good at interacting with other children, and which are a little more cautious. They will arrange classrooms and groups to play to everyone's strengths.

## What parents can do

- Let your child know that if one child doesn't want to play with them, they still have friends and people who care about them.
- Encourage your child's interests and get them involved in clubs or groups that have similar interests.
- Whether your child has one special friend or many friends doesn't matter as long as they are happy and content.
- Don't be alarmed to discover that children's friendships are often very up and down.
- Help them to understand that conflict is a normal part of everyday life, and that they can cope.

- Help them to maintain friendships outside of school, so they know the world is bigger than the school playground.
- Talk to your child about forgiveness. Being able to overlook and forgive mistakes and upsets are sure ways to keep good friends.
- Your child starting school is also an excellent opportunity for you to make new friends with other parents – having a support network of other parents can be invaluable.

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### **Finding out more**

- [Raising Children's Network – Supporting your child's school-age friendships](#)
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## **Bullying**

Bullying is a serious issue for everyone within a school community. As a parent, you want your child to feel safe and to be safe at school. The best way to tackle bullying (including cyber bullying) is for schools, students and parents to work together.

### **How schools deal with bullying**

Your school will promote a safe, supportive and respectful learning environment where bullying is not tolerated and positive relationships are actively promoted.

All Victorian Government schools are encouraged to support the Bully Stoppers campaign, which provides tools to help students, parents, teachers and principals work together to prevent and respond to bullying.

### **What parents can do**

If you are concerned your child is being bullied, harassed or physically hurt, talk to your school. School staff understand that it can be distressing to report that your child is being bullied and will respond to and investigate any reports of bullying.

They will try to support you and your child as much as possible and include you in discussions about possible strategies.

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### **Finding out more**

- [Department of Education and Training – Bully Stoppers](#)
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# Beating the bugs



*“I have taught Ethan to cough into his elbow if he doesn't have a tissue. This means he doesn't spread germs by touching things with sneezed-on hands.”*  
*Liz, Ethan's mum*

## Common health issues in school-aged children

As any parent whose child has been to kindergarten, childcare or even a birthday party knows – whenever a group of children get together, there is a chance for infections to spread!

Some health issues you and your foundation child may encounter include:

- **Tummy troubles**, for example, Norovirus is a very common cause of gastroenteritis, or “gastro”, that can easily spread between children in the classroom.

Before taking a trip to the doctor, it can be a good idea to ask your child if there is anything they are feeling worried about. Often, children who are nervous or anxious about something complain of stomach pain or feeling sick.

- **Skin rashes**, for example, Impetigo, also known as “school sores”, is a highly contagious skin infection caused by the Staphylococcus or Streptococcus bacteria. Impetigo looks unsightly, but it isn’t dangerous and doesn’t cause any lasting damage to the skin.

Hand, foot and mouth disease is another common virus with symptoms that can include a high temperature and small blisters on the inside of the mouth, palms of hands and soles of feet.

- **Sniffles, sneezes and coughs** can be frequent in the cooler months but are usually not serious. Unlike a regular cold, Influenza, also known as flu, can be more troublesome. The flu tends to have additional symptoms, like fever, and muscle aches and pains, which do not usually occur with a cold. It’s common for children to need at least a week off school to recover from flu.
- **Head lice, sometimes known as ‘nits’**, are a type of insect that continue to cause concern and frustration for some parents, teachers and children. The main symptom is an itchy scalp. Head lice do not spread disease and are not related to having ‘dirty’ hair. They are spread by direct hair-to-hair contact; something that happens when children play, cuddle or sit closely together.

It is important to remember that head lice are more annoying than dangerous.

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### Finding out more

- [Better Health Channel – Gastroenteritis \(gastro\)](#)
  - [Better Health Channel – Head lice \(nits\) – prevention and treatment](#)
  - [Better Health Channel – Impetigo \(school sores\)](#)
  - [Better Health Channel – Conditions and treatments](#)
  - [Department of Education and Training – Infectious diseases policy](#)
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## Prevention

It is just not possible to stop all bugs from spreading at school, however, a lot of illnesses can be prevented simply by practicing good hygiene. Practising good hand hygiene, using soap and water, is one of the most important ways to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Creating healthy habits and good hand hygiene practices during childhood is a good way to ensure lifelong healthy decisions and actions.



“ I get Deshi to be a soapy hero and sing the ‘Happy Birthday’ song all the way through twice while he washes his hands. That way he’s actually washing the germs off rather than just putting his hands under the tap for a second.”  
 Meiying,  
 Deshi’s mum

## What parents can do

The four main ways of preventing the spread of infectious disease are:

1. Getting your child involved in ‘soapy hero’ training to help keep classmates, friends and family healthy:
  - make sure your child is regularly washing their hands with soap and water and drying thoroughly or using an alcohol-based hand rub if there is no soap and water.
2. Reminding your child of effective hygiene methods, including:
  - covering their mouth and nose when they sneeze or cough, disposing of tissues and washing their hands.
3. Keeping your child home when they are unwell.
4. Ensuring your child’s immunisations are up to date.

## What schools do

The school will work with you to promote good hygiene practices, as well as taking a range of precautions to prevent the spread of infections. The school may also provide learning to your child about hand hygiene through use of the *Clean Hands* curriculum resource.

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## Finding out more

- Better Health Channel – **Be a Soapy Hero!**
  - Department of Education and Training – **Clean hands curriculum resource**
  - Department of Education and Training – **Personal hygiene policy**
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# When to stay home



*When Astrid got conjunctivitis the doctor told us that she couldn't go to school until her eye stopped being 'goosed up', because it spreads so easily. The doctor said little kids are good at spreading things around because they tend to have more physical contact with each other than adults.*

*Lars, Astrid's dad*

## Exclusion

Keeping unwell children out of school (known as 'exclusion') is the most effective way of limiting the spread of infection in the school.

Under Victorian law, there are some infectious conditions that require children to be kept away from school for certain periods of time. Which conditions and for how long depends on how dangerous it is and how easily it spreads.

### What parents can do

Your doctor will let you know if your child has an 'excludable' condition. You will need to let the school know as soon as possible and keep your child home for the length of time that your doctor advises.

### What schools do

For some excludable conditions, there are additional requirements under Victorian law for schools to inform the Department of Health and Human Services. If a child from the school is diagnosed with whooping cough (also known as 'pertussis'), measles, mumps, rubella, meningococcal disease or polio, the school must tell the Department of Health and Human Services. The school will then follow the department's advice on what to do to protect students.



*We moved to Australia two months before Jai started school. We went to a doctor who helped us to get all Jai's vaccines up to date and gave us a certificate for the school enrolment.*

*Lin, Jai's mum*

## Immunisation status certificate

An immunisation status certificate is a statement showing which vaccines your child has had. The certificate is an *Immunisation History Statement* from the **Australian Immunisation Register**.

### What parents can do

By law, you must provide your child's immunisation status certificate when enrolling your child in primary school. Even if your child has not had any vaccines, a certificate must still be provided to the school.

The quickest way to get your child's statement is by using your Medicare online account through myGov or Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

You can also visit your local Medicare service centre or request for your child's statement to be posted to you by calling the AIR enquiries line on 1800 653 809. It can take 14 days to get your statement in the post.

### What schools do

The school keeps a copy of the certificate so that, in the event of a disease outbreak, unimmunised children can be quickly identified and excluded from school until the risk of infection has passed.

Children whose immunisation status is unknown (because no certificate has been provided to the school) can also be excluded.

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### Finding out more

- Department of Health and Human Services – **Immunisation schedule Victoria** for a list of childhood vaccines.
  - Department of Health and Human Services – **School exclusion table**
  - Department of Education and Training – **Immunisation policy**
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# Children with chronic conditions



“Chandra gets asthma after she’s had a bad cold, but it only comes on if she’s been running around outside in the cold. She coughs and coughs. We’ve given the Asthma Care Plan to the school and we also talked to Chandra’s teacher, Jeanette. Jeanette knows the cough to listen for and gives her the puffer. Everyone knows what they need to do to help Chandra out.”

Dayton,  
Chandra’s mum

Children with a chronic health condition need extra support to do their best at school. Schools, parents, carers and doctors all have a role and need to understand what is required and expected to support your child.

## What schools do

Schools are guided by special support policies for conditions, including:

- asthma
- anaphylaxis
- diabetes
- epilepsy
- cystic fibrosis
- cancer
- acquired brain injury
- haemophilia.

In most cases, schools will work with you and your doctor to develop a plan for supporting your child to manage their condition at school.



## What parents can do

You and the school need to work together to establish and maintain good communication and cooperation. It is important that you:

- share information about your child's condition on enrolment and as needs change
- help the school and the teacher develop a Student Health Support Plan
- keep up good communication – talk to the school about issues as they arise
- review the Student Health Support Plan annually and where necessary (for example, after an episode of illness) make changes to the plan.

**If your child needs to take medication during school hours** talk with their teacher about how and when this needs to happen. You might be asked to provide written instructions for storing and giving the medication. You will also need to give this information again for excursions or camps.

### A special note on food allergies and intolerances

*Food allergy and food intolerance are commonly confused, as symptoms can be similar. However, food intolerance does not involve the immune system and does not cause anaphylaxis. Schools generally discourage children from sharing food. However, children with food intolerances should be guided by parents on which foods to avoid.*

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### Finding out more

- Department of Education and Training – **Specific condition support**
  - Better Health Channel – **Chronic illness – coping at school**
  - Search for the health condition you're interested in at the **Better Health Channel**
-



*Sally has an anaphylactic reaction to peanuts. Finding that out was pretty traumatic but we've known since she was very little, so even though she's only six, she's had lots of practice at asking the right questions before she'll eat something. She knows she needs to keep herself safe.*

*Jodi, Sally's mum*

## Allergies and anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a severe and sudden allergic reaction when a person is exposed to an allergen which can be fatal. Some common allergens include eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (for example cashews), cow's milk, fish and shellfish, certain insect stings and medications.

### What schools do

When a student is enrolled in a school that is diagnosed at risk of anaphylaxis, schools are required to develop their own School Anaphylaxis Management Policy, so ask your school for theirs. Banning particular foods in schools is not recommended by the Department of Education and Training as it can create a sense of complacency and is difficult to monitor and enforce.

Schools attended by children diagnosed as at risk of anaphylaxis must put prevention and management strategies in place. This includes regular training and updates for staff and the development of an Individual Anaphylaxis Management Plan so they know what to do if a student has an anaphylactic reaction.

### What parents can do

If you know your child is at risk of an anaphylactic reaction you will have developed an **ASCIA Action Plan** with your child's doctor. You must provide this plan to the school. The school will then work with you to develop an Individual Anaphylaxis Management Plan for your child. This will include strategies to minimise your child's exposure to the allergen as well as information on storing and using any necessary medications, for example, epipens.

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### Finding out more

- [Department of Education and Training – Anaphylaxis](#)
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**[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthystarttoschool](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthystarttoschool)**

An online version of this booklet can be found at this web address. Viewing the online version will take you directly to the web links mentioned in the 'Finding out more' sections.

For more information go to [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) or [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)