

Building a healthy school environment

A Peel Public Health resource



Important health and safety information
for families who are registering
their children in kindergarten

Welcome!

Starting kindergarten is an exciting time for you and your child. Peel Public Health supports your school to provide a healthy learning environment for students and staff.

This resource package provides some of the ways you can support your child's health and wellbeing as they start school.

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Help stop the spread of diseases

- **Keep your child home if they're sick.** Children can come back to school when they don't have a fever and their symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours (48 hours for nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea). If your child has COVID-19, they should wear a mask in public for 10 days after symptoms started.
- **Practice good hygiene.** Remind your child to cover coughs and sneezes with their elbows and wash hands often or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Cases of respiratory illness generally increase throughout the fall and winter months. Please review the most current guidance from Peel Public Health on our website at peelregion.ca/health/diseases-infections/protect-yourself-fall-winter. If you have general questions or don't know where to access care, call Health Connect Ontario (formerly Telehealth) at **811**, available 24/7 in multiple languages, or speak to your health care provider.

Hand washing

Washing hands thoroughly with soap and water, or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is the best way to prevent and stop the spread of infection.

Unclean hands are the most common way to spread infections.

Help your children stay healthy and prevent illness by getting them into the habit of washing their hands often and properly.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 70% to 90% alcohol can be used when hands are not visibly dirty. **Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be a fire hazard and harmful if swallowed.** To reduce the risk, help and supervise children when using alcohol-based sanitizer. Children should not touch their eyes, nose, or mouth until their hands are dry.



1. Wet hands



2. Soap



3. Lather for 15 seconds



4. Rinse



5. Towel dry



6. Turn taps off with single use towel

When should kids (and adults) wash their hands?

- When they are dirty
- Before preparing and right after handling food
- Before eating
- After using the toilet
- After contact with contaminated surfaces (e.g., garbage bins, cleaning cloths)
- After handling pets
- After wiping or blowing their nose, handling dirty tissues, or sneezing into their hands

Get and report your child's vaccinations

Vaccinations are our best protection against many preventable illnesses such as influenza and measles.

When you register your child for school, you need to report their vaccinations to Peel Public Health. This includes vaccines given as an infant or in another province or country. **Doctors do not report vaccinations.** See your healthcare provider to receive any missing childhood immunizations (e.g., measles, polio, pertussis) unless exempt.

To report, visit peelregion.ca/health/vaccinations/report.

Over the summer, Peel Public Health may phone you to follow up about your child's vaccination. The phone number will show up as a private number.

If you have questions about your child's vaccinations, call **Peel Public Health at 905-799-7700, toll-free 1-888-919-7800.**



Food safety and nutrition

Food safety

Cleaning your hands, kitchen surfaces, and utensils with hot soapy water will help get rid of bacteria and reduce the risk of food poisoning. Remind your children to wash their hands before they eat their lunch and snacks.

Packing safe school lunches

Getting ready for school can be fun for both kids and parents. While packing lunches for your children, there are a few things to know.

Food can stay out of the fridge for long periods of time in proper lunch containers, **but it is very important to keep cold food cold and hot food hot**. Food should never reach the temperature danger zone between 4 °C (40 °F) to 60 °C (140 °F) where bacteria can grow quickly and cause food poisoning. Foods that are high-risk for spoiling easily require time and temperature control.

Foods that can grow bacteria and cause food poisoning include:

- Meats and fish
- Eggs
- Poultry
- Dairy



Any pre-packaged lunch combinations containing lunch meats and cheese need to be kept cold. Children can get food poisoning and not know they have it.

Soft, insulated, reusable lunch bags or boxes are good for the environment and the best choice for keeping lunches safe. To keep food warm, heat it before your child leaves for school and pack it in a container or thermos. To keep food cold, place an ice pack in the lunch bag. If you don't have an ice pack, you can freeze an orange or yogurt snack and pack it in the lunch bag or box to help keep the food cold.

Always wash lunch bags with hot soapy water after each use. Never reuse sandwich bags, foil, and plastic wrap.

For more information, visit peelregion.ca/health/protecting/food/

or

canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/seasonal-food-safety/safe-school-lunches.html.

Four quick tips to prevent food poisoning

Clean: Wash your hands and surfaces often with warm, soapy water.

Separate: Make sure to separate your raw foods, such as meat and eggs, from cooked foods and vegetables.

Cook: Research the safe internal temperature for the food you're cooking and always cook it until it reaches that temperature. You can check this by using a digital food thermometer.

Chill: Always refrigerate food and leftovers promptly at 4°C or below.

Did you know?

You can't tell if food is unsafe by its smell or taste. When in doubt, throw it out. For more information, visit

peelregion.ca/health/schools/preventing-infections/

or

canada.ca/en/public-health/services/healthy-living/hand-hygiene.html.

Nutrition

Food and eating habits play an important role in your child's development and how they participate at school.

Some helpful tips for preparing and eating meals together are:

- Share food and cooking traditions.
- Plan meals, shop, cook, and set the table together.
- Show how to wash hands before preparing food and eating meals.
- Preschoolers can measure, add and stir ingredients, slice soft foods, crack eggs, tear lettuce, peel bananas, wash and scrub vegetables.
- Caring adults decide when and where to eat.
- Caring adults choose the foods that will be served.
- Let preschoolers choose how much to eat.
- Sit, talk, and eat together.
- Whenever possible, offer preschoolers the same food you eat.
- Turn off all electronics (e.g., TV, cell phones) and put away toys and books during mealtime.
- Try not to call foods "good" or "bad".

Keep offering children new foods in a positive way.

- It may take 10 or more times before they try a new food.
- Give them time to explore by touching, smelling, and tasting a new food.
- Talk about new foods (e.g., how they grow, texture, colour).
- Serve new foods in different ways (e.g., in soups, stews or stir-fries, with toppings or dips, or as food art).
- Don't bribe or pressure them to eat or drink.
- Children don't need to be praised or rewarded for trying new foods.

Oral health and dental services

Good oral health habits start early! Here are some tips for good oral health:

- Brush teeth two times a day for two minutes each time
- Floss everyday
- Choose healthy food and avoid sticky, sugary food
- Drink water
- Visit a dental professional regularly



Dental screening

Peel Public Health provides free dental screening for children in select grades (including kindergarten) in Peel elementary schools.

A dental screening can help you know if your child needs dental care. If a parent can't afford dental care for their child, the child may be eligible for free dental services through the Healthy Smiles Ontario program. The Healthy Smiles Ontario program provides free dental services for eligible children 17 years old and younger.

Preventive dental services

Peel Public Health provides free preventive dental services (e.g. teeth cleaning, professionally applied topical fluoride, pit and fissure sealants) for eligible children 17 years old and younger.

These services can help to prevent dental problems such as tooth decay.

Call Peel Public Health at **905-799-7700** or visit peelregion.ca/dental for more information.

Healthy sleep and screen time habits

Sleep

Getting enough sleep is important for your child's health and development. Every child is different, but children 3 to 4 years old should try to get between 10 and 13 hours of sleep (including naps) and children aged 5 to 13 should get between 9 and 11 hours of sleep.

Good quality sleep can reduce stress, help manage emotions, and support learning.

By having a healthy bedtime routine, children will develop good sleep habits. Here are some ways you can do this:

- Create a sleep schedule that includes going to bed and waking up at the same times every day.
- Turn off devices and limit screen time at least one hour before bed. Reading can be a great alternative.
- Don't give your child caffeine before bed, including chocolate and caffeinated pop.
- Create a relaxing environment to help your child unwind; for example, dim the lights or use soothing background noise.
- Don't ignore bedtime fears. It's common for children to resist going to bed because of nightmares or sleep problems. Reassure and comfort them.

Make your child's bedtime routine something that makes them feel happy and healthy!



Screen Time

Technology is a great tool for learning and connecting with others, but too much screen time can impact a child's physical and mental wellbeing, especially as they are developing. Too much time in front of a computer, TV, or cellphone can increase your child's risk of becoming sleep-deprived, inattentive, and even overweight. It can impact their early reading, language and social skills, and decrease their readiness for school.

For children 2 to 5 years old, the Canadian Pediatric Society recommends **limiting screen time to one hour or less each day**. Here are some tips for setting technology boundaries with your children:



- Turn off devices when doing things together as a family, including eating.
- Try not to use devices as background noise. Turn off devices when you're not using them.
- Try not to use screens to soothe children. This can make it harder for them to learn to calm themselves down.
- Choose activities like playing outside, reading, or making crafts instead of screen time.
- Be a good role model with your own screen time! Children may not feel like they are your priority if you are regularly distracted by your device.
- It's easier to set screen time boundaries when a child is younger.

Protect your child from the harms of substances

Cannabis poisonings

Did you know that most cannabis poisonings in children happen at home? Because edibles look like regular treats (gummies, cookies, chocolate, etc.), children might eat a lot at once if they are accidentally left in reach. Even a small amount of cannabis can seriously harm a child.

Tips to keep your cannabis products safe:

- Keep edibles out of children's reach.
- Store edibles in child-proof packaging or locked containers.
- Keep edibles away from other food and drinks.
- Don't buy cannabis products that look like candy.
- Avoid taking edibles in front of children.

Risks of second-hand smoke and vape aerosol

Second-hand smoke from cigarettes contains over 7,000 chemicals and is very harmful to children because their lungs are still growing. There is no safe level of exposure.

Health risks for children include:

- Ear infections
- Pneumonia and bronchitis
- Asthma
- Coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath

The long-term effects of second-hand vape aerosol are unknown.



Peel Public Health enforces the provincial Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017. This law bans smoking tobacco or cannabis and vaping any substance in cars with anyone younger than 16 years old inside. It also bans these activities within 20 metres of:

- School property
- Children's playgrounds and sports areas
- Childcare facilities
- Community centres

Tips to keep your home smoke-free

If you smoke commercial tobacco products like cigarettes or shisha, do it outside of the home and away from others.

Inform visitors that you have decided to keep your home smoke and vape-free.

If you need support to quit smoking or vaping, you can visit smokershelpline.ca or text **"iQuit"** to 123456.

Family health programs and resources

You can support your child's physical health by getting active with them. **Physical activity** is the act of movement and the energy you use while moving. Moving often is good for your child's physical, social, emotional, and brain health. Enjoy indoor and outdoor active play with your child!

Physical literacy is learning skills and confidence through movement. Physical literacy skills help children:

- Understand the world around them
- Make choices at their comfort level
- Continue to learn and develop skills

To learn more ways you can get active with your children, visit peelregion.ca/children-parenting/getting-active/.



School travel

As a parent or guardian, you can help build healthy travel habits that are better for the environment. If you live close enough to your local school, make walking or rolling (cycling, scootering, skateboarding) your first choice.

By walking or rolling with your children, you can spend time together, have fun, and be active. You can also encourage your older children to walk or roll on their own, with siblings, or friends, depending on their age and maturity. Plan a route and practice the trip with them. Most of all, make it fun!

Benefits of walking and rolling to school

- Improves concentration and helps your child do better in school
- Reduces stress and is good for your health
- Helps lower the risk of obesity and diabetes
- Reduces traffic around schools, making the area safer for everyone
- Reduces air pollution



Have more questions and not sure who to ask?

For help or more information, connect with **Peel Public Health** online or speak to us by phone or in person.

Call

905-791-7800

1-888-919-7800 (toll-free)

Our Customer Contact Centre is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After-hours service for urgent issues is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Email

info@peelregion.ca

Email is monitored Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In person

Brampton (Regional headquarters)

10 Peel Centre Drive, Brampton

Mississauga

7120 Hurontario Street, Mississauga

Our Service Peel counters are open Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.