



GRAND ROUNDS

Buses are back on the roads, lunch packing is back in full swing, and stacks of information about the upcoming school year are already inundating parents across the Valley.

Back-to-school time is always exciting and quite often overwhelming. RVH wants to take this opportunity to remind families about some key health and safety guidelines to ensure all students stay on track for a healthy, successful year in the classroom.

Dr. Anne Rowan-Legg, a full-time specialist in pediatric medicine at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, also has privileges at RVH and conducts a monthly clinic here. She advises youngsters to practise proper hand washing, especially during this high-risk time for colds, flu and diarrheal illnesses.

"Hand washing is our best prevention against transmitting germs," she says. "Important times for cleaning hands include the end of the school day, before meals, after

playing with other children, and after coughing, sneezing and wiping your nose."

Wash with warm water and soap for at least one minute or use a dab of hand sanitizer and rub all over your hands.

To protect yourself and your children from a more serious winter-time illness, Dr. Rowan-Legg encourages all children older than six months of age to get a flu vaccine.

"The vaccine is safe and it works," and is usually available in late fall. "Just ask your doctor or health clinic."

This year, the new School Food and Beverage policy comes into effect in schools across the province to ensure nutrition standards.

The removal of pop machines and taking hot dogs and French fries off cafeteria menus is a great first step towards improving the food choices available to children in school, believes the pediatrician.

With the obesity epidemic and the prevalence of chronic disease (e.g., Type 2 diabetes

and heart problems) related to poor eating habits, good nutrition is as important as the learning that goes on in the classroom.

"The introduction of the policy doesn't change the fact that the best option is still to pack a healthy lunch with your child. It's less expensive, and children can contribute in making balanced healthy lunches."

Back-to-school means a heavy load for most children! Some signs that a backpack is too heavy: change in posture when wear-

ing the pack, struggling when putting on the pack, back pain, and tingling or numbness in the arms. Some tips for children: wear both straps of the backpack, wear the pack over the stronger mid-back muscles, use proper lifting technique (using legs) and lighten the load! The exercise that children get walking to school with a pack is great.

For teens, high school is a common time to experiment with smoking because of peer pressure. And with high smoking rates here in Renfrew County, Dr. Rowan-Legg knows the best line of defence is to model a healthy non-smoking lifestyle yourself and encourage your teenager to talk about the pressures from friends and if they have access to cigarettes.

Cheryl Spotswood, Safe Schools Coordinator with the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, emphasizes the importance of the parents' role in their child's education and the need for parents and schools to work together.

"It's important that parents have daily direct communications with their children, ask 'How was your day?', and really listen to the answers. Also, keep the lines of communication open with the school and teachers."



Anton and Reece Robillard receive some backpack carrying tips from Dr. Anne Rowan-Legg.

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