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The CPHVA represents registered nurses, school nurses, health visitors and community nursery nurses who work in a primary or community health setting. The CPHVA is committed to advancing practice through education, research and innovation, improving the working lives of its members, and the health and well-being of the public. By producing this booklet, the CPHVA aims to promote good hygiene practice in the community. The CPHVA welcomes Reckitt Benckiser's support. However, in accordance with its professional code of conduct, the CPHVA does not endorse products from any particular manufacturer.

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Parents and carers want their child to be happy, confident and safe in their new school and as a result, school nurses may deal with many health concerns from parents and carers of children in the reception year. Whilst school nurses play an active role as leaders in the effort to prevent illness and promote healthy schools, maintaining the health and safety of hundreds of children is a huge task for any one individual. Therefore, the CPHVA, working with Reckitt Benckiser, the makers of Dettol, has produced this booklet to help school nurses and other professionals provide parents and carers with information that will help alleviate some of their child’s and their own concerns about starting school. The information is easy to read with visuals that parents and carers can use to help discuss health issues with their children.

I hope, as parents and carers of preschool children, you will find this resource useful and that it helps your children to stay healthy as they start school.

Gavin Fergie,
Professional Officer, Unite-CPHVA, RGN, RSCN, HV.
Introduction

Starting school is a major milestone in your child’s life. It can also be the first time they encounter some of the wide variety of germs that cause infections, such as colds, flu and tummy upsets. When your child starts school, their exposure to germs will naturally increase through close contact with other children and through sharing school facilities and equipment. Because your child’s immune system is still developing, they will be less able to fight off these germs and more likely to become ill. Some children may also have incomplete immunisations and understand little about good hygiene practices. This will further increase the risk of infections, both to the child and to those around them. The result may be what seems like endless coughs, colds, tummy upsets and other infections that exhaust you and your child, and can disrupt your child’s learning.

Having your child immunised according to the national schedule can help to protect them from some serious diseases such as tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. However, it is not possible to immunise children against every type of disease. And whilst a balanced diet and an active lifestyle can help to keep your child healthy, good hygiene is the key to stopping the spread of germs and preventing infections.

This booklet aims to help you equip your child with the hygiene skills they need to protect their health once they start school. It also explores some common health-related concerns associated with starting school and provides advice on safeguarding your child’s and your own health through good hygiene at home. If you require further information or advice about keeping your child healthy, consult your GP, practice nurse, health visitor or school nurse. The head teacher should be able to address any other concerns you may have about your child starting school.
Learning to manage alone

Your child's primary school will probably give you and your child lots of advice that will help your child to settle into school. However, there are things you can teach your child at home that will help prepare them for their first day and ensure they stay healthy.

Washing hands

Try to get your child into the habit of washing their hands regularly, particularly after visiting the toilet, and before eating or helping in the kitchen. Thorough hand washing using soap and warm water is one of the best ways to stop germs from spreading and causing colds, flu, tummy upsets and other infections.

Do not assume that your child knows how to wash their hands – show them how to do it properly. Children learn best by example, so make sure you wash your own hands properly too.

The school toilets may be different to those your child uses at home. If possible, visit the school toilets with your child.

When to wash your hands

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before</th>
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<td>• Visiting the toilet or changing a nappy</td>
<td>• Dressing a wound</td>
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<td>• Handling sterilised equipment or preparing a baby's feed</td>
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<td>• Touching a contaminated surface (e.g. a cleaning cloth, used tissue, nappy or potty)</td>
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<td>• Outdoor activities (e.g. gardening)</td>
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How to wash your hands

1. Wet hands with warm water.
2. Apply a small amount of soap.
3. Rub palms together (away from the water).
4. Rub fingers and thumbs, and the areas between.
5. Rub nails on palms.
6. Rub the back of each hand.
7. Rinse with clean running water.
8. Dry thoroughly with a paper towel.

It is best to use disposable paper towels as sharing towels can pass germs from one person to another.

Using a hand sanitiser

Using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser can be an effective and convenient alternative to soap and water. These are particularly useful for destroying germs on visibly clean hands when soap and water are not available and as an added precaution during outbreaks of infection. It may be necessary for your child to use a hand sanitiser (under adult supervision), for example on a school trip, so do show your child how to use a hand sanitiser. Show them how to rub a small amount of sanitiser onto every part of their hands until their hands are dry, and explain that a hand sanitiser will only work properly if their hands are visibly clean.
Using toilets

Using the school toilets for the first time can be daunting for children. The appearance of urinals, the scratchy toilet paper and lack of privacy or cleanliness can be so off-putting that children sometimes try to wait until they get home. For some, this leads to accidents and other problems such as constipation. Some children even avoid drinking at school so that they don’t have to use the toilets, which can cause dehydration.

In 2003, a survey of 56 primary school washrooms showed that 25% did not have any soap available, 23% had no towels and 12% did not have any toilet paper\(^1\). A more recent survey shows that schools are now more aware of the effect that poor school toilets have on children\(^2\). However, more needs to be done to raise standards. If you are concerned about lack of cleanliness or any other aspect of the toilets at your child’s school, speak to the head teacher. They should be able to address any problems.

You can help your child to cope by:

- teaching them how to tell their teacher when they need to use the toilet, and making sure that the words they use at home are phrases their teacher will understand
- helping them to be confident enough to ask for help when they need it
- putting them in clothing that they can easily undo and refasten (elastic waists and Velcro can make life easier)
- practising how to undo and refasten clothing
- making sure they can wipe their own bottom
- ensuring they know that they should wash their hands after using the toilet
- providing spare clothing in case of accidents
- discussing any special needs with the teacher.

Don’t worry too much if your child has problems with practical skills. Reception class teachers are used to helping children in the early days.

To help keep your child well, teach them to put the toilet lid down before flushing the toilet. This helps stop germs from the toilet splashing onto them and nearby surfaces. Show them how to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the toilet. Germs on unwashed hands can easily spread to other places and people.
Coughs and sneezes...

...do spread diseases, so make sure your child is equipped with tissues and knows how to cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and put their used tissues in a bin to prevent the germs spreading to others. Germs that cause colds, flu and other infections spread easily on hands, so encourage your child to wash their hands thoroughly after contact with nasal secretions and tissues.

i
Teach your child to use the inside of their arm to catch a sneeze when they can't get a tissue in time.

Looking after clothes

Changing into and out of school clothes, gym kits and swimwear can be difficult for a child, but is one of the things that you can help them practise before they start school. Teach them how to hang their things up and not to leave them on the floor. You can also saw nametags into your child’s clothes to help stop them straying too far. Before school starts, show your child that you have labelled their clothes with their name, and encourage them to start taking responsibility for their belongings.

When your child starts school, make sure they know that they need to bring any used gym kit and dirty clothes home so that you can launder them. Germs and odours soon build up in clothes, so you need to launder them regularly. It can make life easier if you choose clothes that will withstand a hot machine-wash (at least 60°C).

i
Involve your child in choosing the clothes and equipment they need for school, and encourage them to get their things ready the night before.
Safety issues

Sun protection

Strong sunlight can easily burn young skin. This can be painful and increases the risk of skin cancer later in life. It is a good idea to provide your child with a broad-brimmed sunhat to wear in hot weather and clothing that protects their shoulders. You may need to supply your child with sunscreen too.

A broad-spectrum sunscreen, providing protection against the sun's UVB and UVA rays, is best. The sun protection factor (SPF) indicates the level of UVB protection. The star rating, which ranges from nought to five, indicates the level of UVA protection. Choose a sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (at least SPF 15) and a four or five-star rating.

If you have concerns about your child’s exposure to the sun during the school day, talk to the head teacher.

Road safety

Although your child is too young to start walking to school without supervision, you can begin to teach them the right way to cross the road by always crossing the road safely yourself and explaining what you are doing. Hold your child’s hand when you are near traffic, or get them to hold onto the pushchair if you are using one, and ensure your child walks on the side of the pavement furthest from the traffic. Take extra care on dark winter days to ensure your child is clearly visible to motorists by using fluorescent or reflective clothing.

The Department for Transport’s Think! Education website at www.dft.gov.uk/think/education/early-years-and-primary provides lots of useful road safety advice for parents and children.

Every week, about nine children under the age of six are killed or seriously injured on UK roads. Over 60% are on foot at the time.
Strangers

Parents often tell their children not to talk to strangers, yet a child’s perception of who is a ‘stranger’ can be very different to your own. Although abduction is very rare, it is sensible to teach children:

• they should not go with anyone (even someone they know well) without first telling you or the person who is looking after them
• if someone they do not know tries to take them away, it is okay to kick and scream loudly
• they should tell you if someone approaches them that they do not know
• they can talk to you about anything and you will always love them
• what to do if they are lost
• who they can go to for help if they cannot find you (safe strangers), e.g. police or teachers.

Teach your child to speak up and not be afraid to ask adults for help. Help them to do this by getting them to ask assistants for items when shopping.

Travelling to and from school

Children who travel by car must use a child restraint (i.e. car seat, booster seat or booster cushion) that is appropriate for their height and weight. If your child is going to travel to school by bus, ensure they know how to fasten the seatbelt and check with the school about their arrangements to ensure they escort your child to the correct bus at the end of the school day.

The school may have ‘walking bus’ arrangements which you can join instead of using your car for a short journey. Children should be encouraged to walk as much as possible and whenever it is safe.

The school should have a procedure for collecting children from school that you should follow. However, each teacher may have 30 or more children to despatch home each day, so do make sure your child and their teacher are aware of who has permission to collect them and the arrangements for each day.

Your local authority may provide free transport if your child’s primary school is more than 2 miles away or if your child is unable to walk. Find out if your child is eligible at www.direct.gov.uk or ask the head teacher.
A healthy lunch

Providing a varied and balanced diet is an important way to protect your child's health and promote proper growth and development. The correct diet can aid your child's concentration and help them reach their full potential. It will also help to prevent health problems such as anaemia and dental decay, and help their immune system to fight infections.

A balanced diet is one that provides a wide variety of foods from each of the four main food groups (in the proportions shown below) whilst minimising the amount of fatty and sugary foods consumed. Food and drinks high in fat or sugar, such as chocolate, crisps, cakes and biscuits, are not essential to health, and eating too much of these foods can lead to obesity, dental decay and heart disease.

Some children consume too much fat and salt and have sugary foods and drinks too often. Some do not get the right amounts of vitamins and minerals because their diet lacks fruit and vegetables.

The eatwell plate

Use the plate to help you get the balance right. The plate shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.
Do help your child to eat healthily by:

- setting a good example yourself
- encouraging them to make healthy choices and try a wide variety of foods
- providing nutritious, balanced meals
- not giving them sugary foods, such as sweets and fizzy drinks to take into school
- replacing sugary snacks with fresh fruit, vegetables, unsalted nuts, seeds, milk or water.

Your child should eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day.

Every child must have access to a meal at lunchtime. You may provide your child with a packed lunch or let them eat a school lunch. Free school lunches are available to children whose parents receive benefits. You can find out if your child is eligible and apply online at www.direct.gov.uk. Alternatively, ask the head teacher or school secretary.

To prepare your child for lunchtime at school:

- Talk to them about what will happen.
- Make sure they have access to drinking water throughout the day.
- Encourage them to wash their hands before eating.
- Check they can open their lunch box and flask or water bottle.
- Get them into the habit of sitting at a table to eat and try to make meal times enjoyable, social occasions.
- Practise using a knife and fork at home.
- Encourage them to clear their own plates from the table.
- If they have a food allergy, make sure they know how to avoid and refuse food that may be unsafe for them.
School meals

All school lunches and other food provided in school, including breakfast, mid-morning snacks, and food available from school tuck shops, vending machines and at after-school clubs, must comply with the national nutritional standards and requirements for school food. These standards help ensure a balanced diet by providing food from each of the four main food groups every day and restricting the amount of fatty and sugary foods. The standards encourage school caterers to provide a selection of foods that over the week reflect the correct proportions of the main food groups, and reinforce healthy eating messages. The school’s policy on food and supervision at lunchtime should be available for you to see.

If your child has specific dietary requirements, e.g. due to a food allergy, intolerance, a religious requirement or other reason, discuss these with the school to ensure that they can provide suitable balanced meals. A home-packed meal may be advisable in some cases. Do discuss any concerns with the head teacher before your child starts school.

Packed lunches

Packed lunches should provide a balanced diet too. However, packed lunches often fail to meet the national nutritional standards for school meals. A national survey by the School Food Trust found that children’s lunch boxes typically contained too much fat, salt and sugar, and 42% did not include any fruit or vegetables.

Children should not bring sweets and sugary drinks into school.

When preparing a packed lunch, try to provide foods in the correct proportions and vary the contents every day. As well as being more interesting, a varied diet is important to give your child all the nutrients they need to grow and stay healthy. The School Food Trust website at www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk provides useful tips and 3 weeks’ worth of healthy and nutritionally balanced packed lunch menus to help you. The school nurse may also be able to give you tips on preparing a healthy packed lunch.

Water is a healthier choice than soft drinks that can be high in sugar, sweeteners, additives and even caffeine.
Food safety
As well as ensuring your child’s packed lunch is nutritious and tasty, you also need to ensure that the food you provide is safe. Each year in the UK, around 500 people die from food poisoning. Children are more vulnerable to food poisoning than adults, and lunch boxes can provide germs with all the warmth, moisture and food they need to multiply. So, take extra care when preparing and storing your child’s lunch to reduce the risk of tummy upsets.

- Wash and dry your hands before you start.
- Clean and disinfect the kitchen work surfaces.
- Use an airtight, rigid lunch box that you wash and dry before and after use.
- Check all food is within its use-by or best-before date.
- Prepare ready-to-eat and cooked foods separately from raw foods, i.e. use separate chopping boards and knives.
- Wash fruit, salad and vegetables thoroughly – especially if they will be eaten raw.
- Freshly prepare food each day – less storage time gives less opportunity for germs to grow.
- If you have to store packed lunches overnight, check labels to ensure you store foods at the right temperature.
- Check that your child can store their food somewhere cool until lunchtime.
- Consider using a freezer pack or cool bag to help keep your child’s lunch chilled.
- Remind your child to wash their hands before opening their lunch box.
- Discourage your child from sharing the contents of their lunch box.

Drinking water
Plenty of drinking water is important. Even slight dehydration can lead to poor concentration, lethargy, irritability and headaches. Despite the availability of drinking water at school, some children drink little or no water during the school day. To encourage your child to drink, you may wish to provide them with water in a bottle. Make sure you clean and rinse containers (including lids and cups) thoroughly before and after use.

When you first visit the school, show your child how to use the water fountain or where to obtain drinking water.