



As a parent, letting your child back to school may have been a journey full of anxiety, uncertainty, and a wave of emotions, coming after 18 months of disruption to the education system from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In July 2021, UNICEF reported, "Children have endured tough times since COVID-19 arrived in Kenya. In 2020, school closures interrupted learning for over 17 million children and increased their risk of violence, child labour and child marriage. Mental well-being suffered" (<https://www.unicef.org/kenya/stories/after-covid-19-lets-reimagine-education-kenya>).



This time, back to school involves more than shopping for the supplies and uniforms, planning the logistics of travel, or preparing your child for the new school year. More than ever, caring for your child's health, safety, physical and mental wellness is a priority.

Here are 5 easy yet important steps to ensure that your child remains well through the school year.

1. Reinforce COVID Precautions:



Maintaining physical distancing is a critical way to slow the spread of Covid-19, as it spreads through human contact from one person to another, particularly in indoor spaces or close contact. So, avoid close contact with people who are sick; stay at least 6 feet away from people who don't live in your household, particularly if they are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or you do not know their vaccine status; and avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces. <https://www.houstonmethodist.org/blog/articles/2020/mar/social-distancing-why-you-should-take-it-seriously-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html?>

Proper use of mask: How many times do you find yourself adjusting your child's mask or replacing it with a new one when you are out? Masking helps prevent any infectious diseases released while breathing, coughing, talking, or singing. In fact, the US CDC recommends that all unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people, including children 2 years and older, should wear a mask in all indoor public settings. Proper masking is particularly important especially where social distancing is a challenge, and in indoor settings. Masks should be clean, cover the nose and the mouth does not hang under the chin, and should never be shared or exchanged. with others. Every day as a parent I remind my child that "sharing is caring" however, I have had to let her know that sharing a used mask is not caring but dangerous. And I try to be a role model by wearing a mask in all indoor public spaces, despite being fully vaccinated myself.

<https://www.houstonmethodist.org/blog/articles/2020/apr/coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-new-cloth-face-covering-recommendations/>

Washing of hands with soap and clean water helps in killing germs and helps prevent spread of these germs. Hand washing has been effective in controlling the spread of Covid as Covid droplets may have fallen on surfaces. By touching the surface and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with uncleaned hands, you or your child may get infected by Covid 19. <https://www.houstonmethodist.org/blog/articles/2020/mar/hand-washing-why-it-matters/>

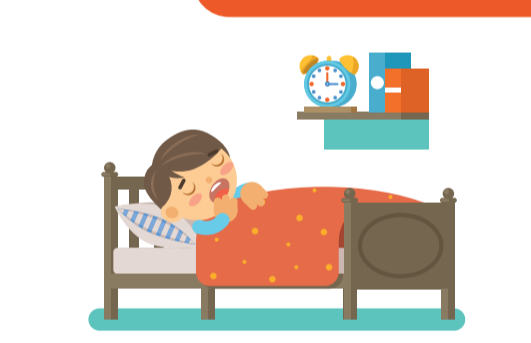
2. Visit The Doctor's Office



A check up with the doctor before going back to school will ensure that your child is healthy and that all their immunizations are up to date. "23 million children missed out on basic childhood vaccines through routine health services in 2020, the highest number since 2009 and 3.7 million more than in 2019" this was reported May this year by UNICEF and the WHO, following the Covid 19 burden that hit the world. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/23m-children-missed-vaccines-in-2020-nearly-4m-more-than-year-before-un/2304861> Beyond COVID, missed immunizations can be a serious health risk for a child.

We currently do not have guidelines on flu vaccination in Kenya, but flu vaccine is still available in Kenya and flu vaccination is encouraged for school-age children. Annual flu vaccination is the best method for preventing flu and its potentially severe complications.

3. Get Back Into the Routine



Try as much as possible to tune back to the original school day routine. Consider reducing screen time, including the number of hours they spend on their phones/ tablets/ laptop/ television. The blue light emanated from these electronics sends signals to the brain that it is still daytime hence disrupting sleep patterns. Always keep away from electronics 2 to 3 hours before bedtime <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/bedroom-environment/blue-light>.

Encourage your child to sleep early and enough. The US CDC recommends.

- 9-12 hours of sleep for children aged 6 -12 years and
- 8-10 hours for 13 – 18 years. https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html

4. Provide/Pack Healthy Snacks and Encourage Hydration



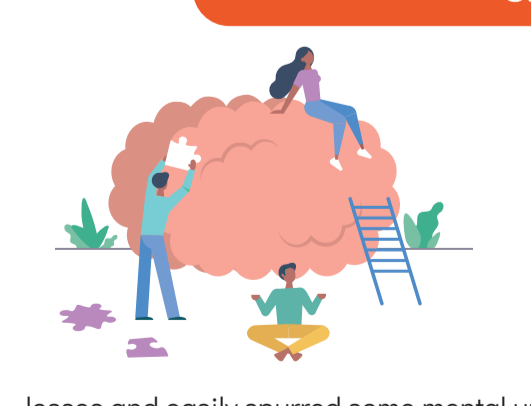
As physical and mental health are important, so is good nutrition. Plan a healthy snacks or lunches for your child to carry to school or to take after school. Carrot sticks and hummus, Half of toasted sandwich, Fruit slices, Homemade pop corns, yogurt, Milk, breakfast cereals, cupcakes (once a week), granola bar/ granola, fruit smoothie, hard boiled eggs etc.

Did you know that human bodies are 60% water? Our bodies require hydration for healthy functioning. In fact, apart from the health benefits, evidence suggests that if you want to boost your child's results in the classroom, then a simple glass of water may be the solution. Research by the University of East London suggests that children who drink water experience an improvement in their fine motor skills, visual attention, and class performance. Always encourage your child to hydrate with healthy drinks like water, milk, and fresh fruit juice both at home and at school. [Link: Hydration in Education: Drinking More Water Improves Test Scores](https://www.unicef.org/kenya/stories/after-covid-19-lets-reimagine-education-kenya)

Reduce sugary drinks, soft drinks, and energy drinks. These drinks are packed with sugar and caffeine. Too much caffeine tends to increase heart rates, triggers blood pressure, and interrupts sleep and can cause nervousness and irritability. <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2016/11/404796/study-links-shorter-sleep-and-sugar-sweetened-drink-consumption>

Good hydration prevents fatigue, improves mood, aids in digestion and maintenance, and enhance brain function.

5. Prioritize On Mental Health



There is a growing link between the disruptions associated with Covid 19 and mental health challenges for children and adolescents, and as parents, we cannot assume our children are unaffected. Children also do experience stress and other mental health related issues just like adults, Covid 19 changed a lot including our way of living, children love playing together hence the need to keep them away highly affects their mental health. Other families had to change their lifestyle completely because of Covid 19 which led to job losses and easily spurred some mental unease to the affected families. A candid talk with your child will let you know what is worrying them about going back to school. Reassure them that all will be well, and they have someone to talk to anytime. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/6-ways-parents-can-support-their-kids-through-coronavirus-covid-19>

The return to school can be a daunting prospect for parents and children at any time, and may be particularly challenging with the disruptions, restrictions, and changes imposed by the COVID19 pandemic. We hope these few simple ideas can help to alleviate some of the stresses and challenges of the return to school. At HealthX Africa, we believe you should have the power to make the best health and wellness decisions for yourself and your family, not driven by cost or fear, but by what you need. Be it preventive, promotive, curative, or rehabilitative primary health care, we strive to be your constant and trusted partner on your health and wellness journey, and to support you in achieving your dreams and aspirations for yourself and your family. If you have any questions, or need any more information about COVID19, your child's health, or any other health care issues, contact us anytime on our toll-free number **0800 720 795**.