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NEWS

CONSIDER ADDING THESE ITEMS TO YOUR CHILD'S BACKPACK

MEGAN DELAIRE
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Students are heading back to class, and they, like their parents, might need to carry supplies they've never had to think about before.

Keeping in mind that different school boards will have their own rules and guidelines around the use of backpacks and personal items, here are some general tips from public health experts about supplies parents might want to send their children to school with.

MORALE BOOSTERS

Dr. Andrea Feller is the associate medical officer of health for the Niagara Region Public Health Department, and parent to two elementary school students.

Recognizing that the return to school amid new pandemic containment measures will be disconcerting for young children, Feller urges parents to slip encouraging notes into students' bags to help minimize anxiety levels at school.

"What I would say universally is if you want to pack things in their backpacks because of (COVID-19), pack little notes of love in there," she said. "Pack little things that are going to reassure them."

MASKS AND PROPER STORAGE

This year, face masks and coverings will be mandatory for all students from Grades 4 to 12. Feller said any student — or adult — should know how to store a mask when not using it, and bring appropriate containers for doing so.

"The outside of the mask is the part that's contaminated, so you take it off with your ear loops, you fold it so the outside is folded in on itself, and then you store it," Feller said, adding that masks should never be worn under a chin or dangling from an ear when not in use.

Wendy Pons is a certified public health inspector and a professor at Conestoga College's Environmental Health Program. She is also a parent to two daughters entering Grades 1 and 4. She recommended packing spare masks and labelling masks with the child's name to prevent mixups at school.



Highwaystarz/Dreamstime photo
Parents in Muskoka are unsure about whether to send their children back to school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Pack an extra mask for the student, so if one becomes dirty or wet they can change it or even just change it at lunchtime, because that's a point where they will have to take it off," she said.

SANITIZER AND WIPES

Pons and Feller offer different opinions about whether there's a place for hand sanitizer in a child's backpack. Feller said it's prudent for adolescents to take it, but warned parents against overloading young children with too many new supplies, especially if those supplies may be provided by their school.

"The thing I would advise my patients is really to not try to change too much, unless you need to," she said.

Pons also expects schools will supply hand sanitizer and hand-washing stations for students, but said as long as there aren't rules against students bringing hand sanitizer, parents should feel free to pack it at their discretion.

PERSONAL SCHOOL SUPPLIES AND DRINKING WATER

Pons said she plans to send her daughters to school with bottles of water, since their school's drinking fountains will be off-limits, and their own school supplies.

"In previous years, our school has said, 'Don't send your own supplies, because we have enough for everybody,' but this year they'll be going with their own pencil case as well as notepad," she said. "Because you don't want them sharing books, pencils, erasers, any of that kind of stuff."

Ultimately, she said, one of the best ways parents can keep their kids safe is to help them stay nourished and well rested, through lots of sleep, exercise and a healthy diet of immune-boosting fruits and vegetables.

"The healthier you can keep your kids, the less likely that, even if they contract the virus, they'll become ill," she said.