

Ready, Set, Kindergarten!

Junior Kindergarten (JK) Resources



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Welcome to Kindergarten

Starting JK is a busy time! In this document, you will find information about how to prepare your child for their first day, what to expect, and some other health behaviour tips to help make this transition as smooth as possible.



Health Check-Ups to Think About

Schedule a dental check-up

Healthy teeth and gums are important for your child's growth and development. They are crucial for eating, speaking, and giving shape to your child's face. Untreated dental conditions can affect sleep, self-esteem, and the ability to concentrate and learn. It's important to establish a good dental hygiene routine early on, even with baby teeth. Help your child brush their teeth two times a day for two minutes each time, and don't forget to floss.



There are financial support programs available to help cover dental costs. Free preventive services can be provided for eligible families at the health unit. Contact the number below for more information.

Each year at school, students in JK, SK, as well as grades 2, 4, and 7 will have their teeth screened by a Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH). Students

who need follow-up or whose parents request a screening will also be checked. A dental screening is a quick visual inspection done to identify obvious dental conditions that are causing or will cause pain, but this does not replace your child's regular exam at the dentist. After the screening, your child will bring home a note to let you know the results, and an RDH will follow up on any urgent conditions.

Regular dental visits are needed to maintain oral health and prevent issues before they start. Contact the Dental Team at Northeastern Public Health to find out how we can help! 1-877-442-1212.

Consider signing your child up for the Fluoride Varnish (FV) Program!

This program is FREE of charge and available to Junior (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK) students in select communities with the consent of a guardian.

Fluoride varnish is a safe and quick treatment that makes teeth stronger and helps prevent cavities. It is especially useful in the NEPH area, where the water does not have fluoride, and more children get cavities.

Students in JK and SK grades can get a FV application up to 2 times a year at school.

For families in communities where this program is not offered, your child may be eligible to receive fluoride varnish treatment at one of our office locations. Contact us to find out more.

For more information on dental services and programs, visit our website www.neph.click/oral-health.

Get an eye check-up

Vision health plays a vital role in a child's growth and development. In fact, 80% of classroom learning is visual, and it is estimated that 25% of school-age children have vision problems that can affect their ability to learn. Fortunately, many vision conditions can be treated if they are caught early. Many vision disorders have no symptoms and can only be diagnosed by an optometrist. Comprehensive eye examinations are covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) once every 12 months for all children 0-19 years old. When required, free glasses are available to JK and SK children through the [Eye See...Eye Learn®](#) program, an initiative from **participating optometrists** and corporate partners.

Make sure your child is up to date on their vaccines before school starts

Immunizations are the best defense to protect children from serious infectious diseases that are easily spread in schools.

Under the Immunization School Pupils Act (ISPA), all students enrolled in schools in Ontario must be fully immunized against nine designated diseases:

- Diphtheria
- Polio
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Measles
- Tetanus
- Mumps
- Rubella
- Meningococcal C Infections
- Varicella (chicken pox)



Kindergartners must be up-to-date with their routine vaccines, including their 4-year immunizations. Please see [Keep our children healthy and our schools disease-free](#). For further information, please reach out directly to your local health unit for more information about medical or philosophical/religious exemptions.

Preparing for the 1st day of School

Children learn best through relationships with important people in their lives. As their caregiver, you are their best teacher. You can help your child feel confident and capable in a new environment by helping them learn important skills beforehand:

School Skills

- Teach them how to read and write their name. Recognizing their name will help them find their own things in the classroom
- Practice using scissors
- Practice counting
- Practice holding a pencil
- Colouring

Taking care of themselves and healthy routines

- Putting on and taking off outdoor clothing and shoes
- Using the washroom and washing their hands ([Toilet Learning Information](#))
- Eating with cutlery
- Open and close school backpack, lunch box, water bottle, and containers
- Spending time away from you, learning that they can be looked after by caring adults
- Set daily routines with meals, activities, oral care, washroom breaks, and bedtime to help them learn routines

Play, creativity, and curiosity

- Take part in pretend play
- Be creative (draw, paint, colour, and stick)
- Spend time reading with caregivers, exploring the characters and pictures
- Encourage some quiet, independent play (such as putting a puzzle together)
- Encourage trying new activities and experiences
- Outdoor adventures
- Trying new foods

Being with Others

- Spend time with other children and adults
- Practice sharing and taking turns
- Talk about how they feel and why. Also, talk about how other people feel and why
- Create opportunities for your child to be excited to spend time with close family members, friends, and children the same age.
- Encourage them to set boundaries for themselves and others

Communication, language, listening, and engaging

- Talk positively about kindergarten and answer questions
- Sing along, talk to them, ask questions
- Practice taking turns in conversation by taking turns listening and responding.
- Talking about positive experiences around them
- Encourage independence, and also show them positive ways to ask for help



[Kindergarten | ontario.ca](https://www.kindergartenontario.ca)

[Caring for Kids: Your child's development: What to expect](#)

[Ontario: Preschool Milestones](#)

Long-Term School Success

Parent Engagement

Engaging in your child's education greatly boosts their success and well-being. Research shows that involved parents lead to children with better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and a brighter future. You can support by:

- Asking specific questions about their day
- Communicating with their teachers
- Volunteering at their school
- Participating in school groups (see [school council](#) and [parent involvement committee \(PIC meetings\)](#))

This connection helps your child feel supported both at home and at school!

Attendance

Regular attendance builds important habits and supports student success from day one. Two missed days per month add up to 10% of the school year. Work with your teachers and school to help learning move forward if away. Consistency at home and at school, and strong family values about school attendance, will help your child thrive.

Mental Health

Starting JK can be a stressful time for some children and parents. Teaching your child coping strategies and ways to manage their emotions can give them the necessary tools to handle this stress.

Focus on:

- Connecting, listening, and responding as strategies to help your child.
- Helping children feel good about themselves. This can be done by accepting them for who they are.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's mental well-being, look for support options through:

- [Strong Minds Strong Kids](#)
- [School Mental Health Ontario](#)
- [Caring for Kids](#)



Making Time for Connecting

Families are busy. We're trying to fit school, family time, work, household tasks, and outside commitments into each day. It can feel like a lot to manage.

- Schedule a regular family game night.
- Plan to eat family meals together whenever possible.
- Routines help children understand expectations and provide a sense of security in their lives.
 - Keep wake-up routines cheerful and positive. Mornings can be less stressful by organizing as much as possible the night before.
 - Developing a regular bedtime routine can look like doing relaxing activities such as reading, listening to calm music, or laying in bed talking quietly about the day.
- Dedicate screen-free time to do something fun with your child. This is an opportunity to talk about your day and bond with your child.

- Tuck children into bed each night to give them a feeling of security.

Sleep

- Toddlers (1 to 2 years of age) need 11 to 14 hours of sleep.
- Preschoolers (3 to 5 years of age) need 10 to 13 hours of sleep.
- School-aged children (6 to 12 years of age) need 9 to 12 hours of sleep.

Tips for a good night's sleep:

- Have consistent bed and wake times, even on weekends
- Choose relaxing activities like a bath, reading from a book, or a quiet chat before bed.
- Create a sleep space that is cool, dark, quiet, and free of screens.
- Avoid TV, computer time, video games, or phone use for at least one hour before bedtime.
- Remove electronics from the sleep area.
- Be active during the day.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and sugary snacks before bedtime.
- Don't ignore bedtime fears. If your child has nightmares, reassure and comfort them.



Sleeping has many benefits

Children who consistently get a good night's sleep:

- Are more creative.
- Can concentrate on tasks for longer.
- Have better problem-solving abilities.
- Are better able to make positive decisions.
- Are more able to learn and remember new things.
- Have more energy during the day.
- Can create and maintain good relations with others.

Being Active

Outdoor play is a basic childhood need, and taking risks is a necessary part of play. Your child will be going outside to play and learn. Dress them for the weather and protect them from the sun's harmful rays with a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen.



Physical activity helps children:

- Learn new things
- Have fun playing with friends
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Feel good about themselves
- Improve their health
- Sleep better at night

As your child grows, it is important that they get a good balance between moving, sleeping, and sitting. Get moving! At least 180 minutes is recommended. This can be spent in a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play - more is better!

Teach the Skills

Active School Travel

All JK/SK students are eligible for the school bus. However, starting in grade 1, children must walk if they live within 800m of the school, and starting in grade 4, children must walk if they live within 1.6 kms of the school.

It's never too early to start teaching children walking and biking skills. Adult-led instruction and modelling of safe pedestrian behaviors can help children learn by giving them an opportunity to discuss their safety in real-world walking situations. Visit WalkNRoll.ca for [colouring pages](#) and other age-appropriate resources for teaching children [safe walking](#) and [biking skills](#).

Growth and Development Key Points for Street Safety

Children aged four to six:

- Need supervision.
- Are ready to practice the basics.
- May do the unexpected.
- Need adults to model safe walking behaviour.



Screen Time

Healthy Screen Time

Many families find that screen time is getting in the way of physical activity, sleep, and family connection. We have some ideas on keeping the balance.

- Have a predictable family screen schedule and post it on your fridge.
- Create a screen-free morning and bedtime routine for your child.
- Model healthy screen time by limiting your own screen time when your kids are around.

For more information on screen time – [Screen use and young children | Caring for kids](#)

Recreational screen time recommendations:

2-4 yr. olds 1-hour daily maximum (*less is better*)

5-17 yr. olds 2-hour daily maximum (*less is better*)

Staying Healthy!

Reduce the risk of catching and spreading infections!

Cover your mouth and nose with either a tissue, your upper sleeve, or your elbow when you cough or sneeze.

Encourage your child to wash their hands

- After using the washroom
- Before eating
- Anytime they look dirty
- After touching animals
- After sneezing and coughing



Also, remind your child not to share objects such as water bottles, utensils, and food.

Caring for Kids is a great resource from the Canadian Paediatric Society. For more information, visit [common illnesses and infections and how to care for a sick child](#).

Healthy School Lunch

Sending your child to school with a balanced lunch gives them the energy and nutrients they need to learn and play.

Canada's Food Guide has a great page on healthy eating at school to assist!

[Canada's Food Guide](#)

Keep these tips in mind when planning lunches:

- Check your school policy on food allergies.
- Hot Lunch? Use a thermos to keep warm until lunch!
- Cold lunch? Pack with ice packs in an insulated lunch bag!
- Finger foods? Use a multi-compartment container!
- Budget-friendly tip! Use reusable containers that can be easily opened by your child. Make sure to wash between each use.
- Make water your child's "go-to" drink. A reusable water bottle will keep your child hydrated all day!



Most Schools offer free nutrition programs!

This includes the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP) and the Student Nutrition Program (SNP). These programs aim to improve food literacy, student access to nutritious food, and promote a healthy lifestyle! Contact your child's school for more information, or join your child's school council to receive regular updates on programs like this!



For more tips and ideas, please see: [School Lunch Your Kids Will Munch - Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#)

If accessing food for your child is difficult, please reach out to your school and local food banks for additional support. More information and resources in your area can be found on your local health unit website.

Car Seat Safety

It's best not to rush your child through the stages of car seats. Keep your child in each stage for longer, in a seat that fits them and accommodates their weight and height. Children under 13 years old are safest in the back seat of a vehicle.

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a five-point harness until they weigh at least 18 kg (40 lbs) and are able to sit straight and tall for the whole ride, without moving around or unbuckling. This may be at 4, 5, 6, or even 7 years old.

A booster seat positions your child so that the adult seat belt fits safely across their strongest bones and away from their soft belly. Your child must weigh at least 18 kg (40 pounds) to use a booster seat.

Keep in mind that your child should continue to use a booster seat until they are at least 4'9" (145cm) tall and fit the adult seat belt correctly. This usually happens between the ages of 10 and 12.

Have a look at this resource to help you ensure that your child is in the right seat: [Is your child in the right seat?](#)

NEPH staff can help you understand when to go from a rear-facing car seat to a forward-facing seat and then up to a booster seat. They can also advise on when your child is ready to move out of a booster seat and use just a seatbelt.

In select communities, have your child's car seat checked FREE by Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians trained staff. They will ensure your child is riding in the proper type of seat for their age, height, and weight, check for wear and tear, proper fit, installation, and anchoring. Call us at 1-877-442-1212 for more information or to book an appointment.



Other Provincial Resources

- Ontario Program Info: [Health811 - Spotlights](#)
- Health811: connect with a registered nurse day or night for free, secure, and confidential health advice
 - Call 811 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007)
 - [Chat online](#)
- [North East Region Virtual Care Clinic](#)