

## **Doctors write back-to-school check list for children**

New uniforms and lunchboxes are not the only back-to-school priorities with recent measles and mumps outbreaks serving as a reminder to parents to ensure their children's vaccinations are up to date, doctors have warned.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia issued the warning following a measles outbreak in Brisbane earlier this month and recent reports that revealed Queensland recorded the country's highest number of mumps last year.

Dr Dhupelia said the measles virus could live for up to two hours in the air and was contagious for four days before and after the rash appeared, while mumps was most contagious from two days before the onset of the infection of salivary glands to five days after.

"Both of these viruses are highly contagious, but particularly measles," Dr Dhupelia said. "About 90 per cent of the people close to a person who has measles will get the virus if they are not immune and you can contract it simply by being in the same room.

"But it's not just primary school children or those starting school for the first time that need to be concerned about vaccinations.

"Teenagers should also receive vaccinations for meningitis and HPV."

According to the Australian Immunisation Register, 91 per cent of Queensland children are fully immunised, while the rate considered necessary to stop disease outbreaks sits at 95 per cent.

Dr Dhupelia also called on parents to have their children's eyesight and hearing tested at the start of the school year.

"Early detection of developmental delays or issues is critical because, as children get older, the demand on their eyesight and hearing increases at school," he said.

"Students are expected to listen and read for longer periods of time as they get older and their school work becomes more complex."

Dr Dhupelia also called on parents to check their child's backpack and shoes were properly fitted.

"Filled with books, sports gear and lunchboxes, school bags can suddenly become a risk to young spines which aren't developed enough to support the weight," he warned.

"Generally, school bags should weigh about 10 per cent of a child's body weight and backpacks should not be wider than a student's chest. Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps and adjust it so that the bag sits flat on your child's back near their waist rather than resting down on their buttocks."

Properly fitted school shoes will reduce the chances of your child suffering blisters, discomfort or ankle, knee or lower back pain, said Dr Dhupelia.

Other items on the healthy back-to-school list included a wide-brimmed hat rather than a cap, sunscreen to be used daily and large water bottles to combat the summer heat.

“The start of a new school year is also a good time for parents to begin a new food regime of healthy, balanced meals,” Dr Dhupelia said.

“The best chance of children embracing fresh, healthy foods is to make sure it looks enticing and tastes good which can be a challenge for school lunch boxes in the heat of a Queensland summer.

“Including a frozen bottle of water in your child’s lunchbox will ensure the food remains chilled and safe to eat and is a better drink option than a sugary juice or soft drink.”

**Media contact: Fran Metcalf, Sequel PR: 0417 627 867, 3251 8131**