

# Mayo Clinic Q & A - Dr. Tina Ardon - Back to school

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## SPEAKERS

Dr. Halena Gazelka, Narrator, Dr. Tina Ardon

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**N** Narrator 00:01  
Coming up on Mayo Clinic Q&A,

**D** Dr. Tina Ardon 00:03  
I think routine is really the biggest thing to start focusing on prior to starting back at school. So, now's the time, if you're not already in it, to start thinking about what that looks like in terms of going to bed on time, waking up at a certain time, what are we going to be doing for breakfast and lunch, and those family dinners. And so, starting those conversations now can be really helpful to make sure you start off on a good fit. As kids had back to school, it's not uncommon for both parents and children to have a bit of anxiety. To help that transition to in-class learning, communication with your child is one of the keys to a successful school year. Communication, I think, is so huge. And so, just keeping those open lines of communication is so important. There are lots of ways for us to kind of prepare ourselves now for either a new classroom, a new school, we can talk about what they're excited about or nervous about. Take advantage of return to school activities where you can meet the teacher, where you can walk around preparing your child for that first day.

**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:00  
Welcome everyone to Mayo Clinic Q&A. I'm your host, Dr. Halena Gazelka. It may feel hard to believe, but in some parts of the country school has already begun. And in the next several weeks almost all the children will be back in school after the Labor Day holiday. A new school year can be both exciting and scary. So, how do you help your kids prepare? What does year three of COVID mean for us returning to school? Joining us to discuss is Dr. Tina Ardon. Dr. Ardon is a family medicine physician at the Mayo Clinic in Florida. Thanks for being here today, Tina.

**D** Dr. Tina Ardon 01:37  
Thank you so much for having me.

**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:39  
Well, I can hardly believe that summer is almost over it. It feels like it here in Minnesota. It might feel differently for you in Florida, but here in Minnesota, it feels like we just started summer, and now kids are going back to school.

**D** Dr. Tina Ardon 01:53  
Yes, it's hard to believe, I think for me as well. This is my first year having all three of my kids in the school setting. So, this is a very relevant topic for me as a parent.

**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 02:01  
Wow. That's wonderful, then let's just jump right in. First off, how about some general thoughts about preparing kids to go back to school? What should parents focus on?

**D** Dr. Tina Ardon 02:10  
I think that routine is really the biggest thing to start focusing on prior to starting back at school. So, now's the time, if you're not already in it, to start thinking about what that looks like in terms of going to bed on time, waking up at a certain time, what are we going to be doing for breakfast and lunch, and those family dinners. And so, starting those conversations now can be really helpful to make sure you start off on a good foot.

**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 02:32  
And how important is that Tina, that kids have a routine?

**D** Dr. Tina Ardon 02:37  
It's so important not only for our kids, but actually for our families, and for us as adults as well. We like to think about routines, focusing on sleep too. That's just a huge part of how we can do well in an academic setting, but also really important for our health in general for our kids. That's where our kids grow. That's where brain development can happen. So, focusing on a really good sleep schedule and routine for that, it's just so important for us to be prioritizing as families.


**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 02:01

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 03:01

I think that's great advice. I think life is a lot less stressful when you follow a routine.

 Dr. Tina Ardon 03:07


Absolutely. Yes.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 03:09

So, what about teenagers and sleep? You mentioned sleep, how much sleep do teenagers need?

 Dr. Tina Ardon 03:15

That's a great question. You know, teenagers really do need about eight to 10 hours of sleep, maybe some need actually more than that, depending on that patient and just the way that their body is built. So at least eight to 10 hours of sleep. And honestly, when I see my teenage patients, I rarely hear that answer that they're getting that much sleep. And it just is such a challenge, I think, with how busy life can be for our adolescents with school, and after school activities, and sports, and things on the weekend, and family obligations. And I think it just, again really is important for us to step back and say this is an important part of our health and development. Let's really make a sleep schedule, as you know, a priority for our family.

 Dr. Halena Gazelka 03:53

Tina, I think this year is particularly exciting as we are at year three in our COVID era, because the CDC has now relaxed their guidelines a bit, and I think that more kids will be face-to-face in school this year than have been in the past couple of years. So, a big question for parents might be how in the world do I know if I keep my kids home for an illness?

 Dr. Tina Ardon 04:20

Yeah, but it's definitely a difficult question. And I think some of those things have not really changed, COVID or not. So, we think about some general rules that we want our families to follow when keeping our kids home from school. We certainly don't want to keep our kids home any more than they have to be. But there are sometimes it's really important not only for their own health, but also for the health of the kids around them, and the school staff for us to keep our kids home so we're not spreading infectious disease. Fever is always a reason to keep your child home from school. That generally indicates there is something more serious going on, or at least that they need to be home recovering. We think about things like vomiting and diarrhea. Those can also be symptoms of something more infectious as well. That's a good reason to keep your kids home. Look at your child as well, you know, they just don't feel good, they're not going to perform well at school. So, we don't want to send our kids to school that aren't going to be able to participate fully. So, just listening to your child's clues too in terms of how they're feeling is really important. I think other symptoms are really difficult. You know, a

little bit of a runny nose, maybe a slight cough, you know, allergies tend to be something we struggle with always here in Florida. And so, keeping your kids home just for allergies isn't really a good reason. But you're looking for other symptoms with that, and how the child looks to help determine if they really just need to stay home and rest from school.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 05:31

Tina, I feel like COVID has been very educational for all of us in terms of staying home when you're ill. For years, you know, you and I are physicians, you keep pushing, you go unless you really need to be home, and then you feel kind of guilty about it. But the COVID pandemic made us realize that we actually may be harming others significantly more by not taking that time and staying home. So, it's probably a good rule to keep in mind as well. Tell me about vaccinations, COVID vaccinations for kids Who should be vaccinated?

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Dr. Tina Ardon 06:04

Absolutely. So, six months and older, everyone can and should get a COVID-19 vaccine. So, this was a really exciting update over the summer for parents like me who have younger kids who aren't yet able to get vaccinated. So, now we can vaccinate almost all of our population against COVID-19. It's a safe vaccine. It's effective. It helps protect not only us but those around us. So, now's a great time to get up to date before you get back to school.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 06:29

What about flu shots, Tina? Do you recommend those?

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Dr. Tina Ardon 06:33

Absolutely. So, you know, we think about, you know, with any illness, but particularly for our kids, if we want to keep them from missing school, from things that we can prevent, then we should take advantage of the tools we have available. So, vaccines are one of those great tools that we have in helping either prevent disease or helping us not get quite as sick from disease. So, influenza is a great example of that. It's not 100% effective, very few things in life are, but it can be really helpful to make sure that we don't get really sick from flu so that maybe we're only out for a day or two from school, and we can get right back into what we need to do. We're heading into fall already, so you'll probably start hearing about influenza vaccines, and depending on where you live in the country, my advice is to get a flu vaccine when you can. Don't wait too long because sometimes it's already circulating in our community. And we do need to have some time for that vaccine to work so that we're ready to fight that infection.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 07:21

And Tina, I remember hearing during the pandemic, when healthcare was not quite as accessible that some people and some children were getting behind on their vaccines. So, give us a reminder about what other vaccines parents should make sure up to date.

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Dr. Tina Ardon 07:37

Yeah, I think about even the age of the kids that I'm seeing for my routine physicals this time of year. So, for thinking about starting kindergarten, which is a huge step, we're often talking about vaccines like the chickenpox or varicella vaccine, getting up to date on our measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, or the MMR vaccine. For our adolescents we'll also be discussing vaccines such as a tetanus and pertussis booster, the HPV vaccine, which is a vaccine that can prevent human papilloma virus and actually cancers associated with that. So, that's a really important vaccine to talk about. Meningitis vaccines are a common conversation for me to have with my adolescent patients and my patients who are getting ready to go off to college, that's a really important one to review as well.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 08:21

Tina, we've talked now a lot about physical health and getting kids ready for school. And what about mental health? I know that's a big concern. We all want our kids to be mentally healthy, and anxiety can be an issue for kids. How do parents help with that?

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Dr. Tina Ardon 08:37

Yeah, this is a difficult one. But I think that the pandemic allowed us to spend a little bit more time focusing on our mental health and recognizing when we need to address our mental health more. You know, depending on how old or young your child is, sometimes it really is hard to identify. An older child might be able to tell you they're not feeling so great about something, they're worried about something happening at school, or they're worried about getting sick. But some of our younger patients can identify those feelings as well. So, it may only manifest as physical symptoms, it might be headaches, it could be stomach aches that happen right before test day, right before they start back at school. So, being alert to those symptoms can be helpful for parents. And then, you know, whenever you have a question, I think it's just really important to get those kids in for visits so that we can do a good exam, ask the right questions as well, and hopefully identify those problems earlier rather than later so that we can help support that patient as much as possible.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 09:31

I'm thinking that this year a lot of kids might be moving into a new environment, a new school, a different classroom. That's true every year, but particularly probably now after the pandemic. Are there any tips that you can give parents for helping kids to navigate and feel more comfortable in new environments?

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Dr. Tina Ardon 09:50

Communication, I think, is so huge. And so, just keeping those open lines of communication is so important. There are lots of ways for us to kind of prepare ourselves now for either a new classroom, a new school, even a new job for some of our adults, right? So, we can look at

something online, we can look at pictures of the new school, we can look at pictures of our classroom, we can talk about what they're maybe excited about or nervous about. My eight-year-old started third grade this year, so she was nervous about how serious third grade was going to be. So, we just talked that out a little bit. What are you thinking about? Is it homework? Is it new friends, old friends? And so, just allowing your child to have that conversation with you can alleviate a lot of that stress as well. Take advantage of return to school activities where you can meet the teacher and where you can walk around preparing your child for that first day, and those can be really helpful.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 10:39

Thank you so much for that. What else do you want parents to know about back to school?

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Dr. Tina Ardon 10:44

Yeah, as you mentioned, we're in year three of a pandemic school year. So, it continues to evolve. I think all that is needed, you know, be supportive of one another, again keep those lines of communication open. COVID-19 is not gone, it's still with us. We're just, we're evolving with it, if that makes sense. You know, following guidelines that may be changing, now having access to vaccines that are so helpful for us, new medications that are so helpful for us. So, we just need to continue to be open and flexible to those changes, recognize that some of those things are going to be helpful for us and exciting for our kids. And some of that may be a challenge. As you mentioned, some of our kids are going back to school face-to-face for the first time in a long time or face-to-face in a very different physical setting. We want to recognize that that can feel a little bit nerve wracking for some of our kids and just again, be open to addressing those concerns when they come up.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 11:33

It sounds to me, Tina like a lot of advice that is good for kids is good for all of us.

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Dr. Tina Ardon 11:38

I always say that, as a family medicine doctor, I always say that a lot of things I tell my younger patients we can take for our own selves as well, for sure.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 11:46

Thank you for being here today, Tina.

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Dr. Tina Ardon 11:49

Yes, thank you so much for having me.

**D** Dr. Halena Gazelka 11:51

Our thanks to Dr. Tina Ardon, Family Medicine Physician at Mayo Clinic in Florida, for being with us today to talk about back to school. I hope that you learned something. I know that I did. We wish each of you a wonderful day and a successful back to school.

**N** Narrator 12:07

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