



Hello again!

We're excited to catch up with you!

The last time you may have heard from us was when your child was 6 years old, which is when they graduated from the Watch Me Grow program. We hope your child is continuing to grow up healthy and safe with regular health and dental checkups. You are receiving this letter because we've developed a letter focused on the HPV vaccine and other information important to adolescent health. We hope you enjoy this special edition letter!

Sleep Hygiene

Your growing child needs plenty of sleep!

Kids aged 6 to 12 need 9 to 12 hours of sleep each night to stay physically healthy, be mentally alert at school, and maintain good emotional well-being. Children who don't get enough sleep are at increased risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, attention and behavior problems, poor mental health, and injuries.

You can help your child by setting the same bed and wake-up times each day that allows for enough sleep, including on the weekends. Encourage your child to follow a relaxing bedtime routine and keep TVs and devices like tablets and smartphones out of your child's bedroom. Model good sleep behaviors so your child sees that it's a priority for the whole family.



Screen Time

Set personal screen time limits.

The AAP recommends parents of children ages 6 and older set personal screen time limits that make sure their media use does not interfere with sleep, exercise or other healthy behaviors. The reality is there's no magic number that's just right for every child. Create your own family media plan with consistent rules and enforce them for older kids. Visit Common Sense Media for media recommendations and advice for families at www.commonsensemedia.org.

Pay attention to how your kids act during and after watching TV, playing video games, or hanging out online. There's no need to worry as long as:

- They're using high-quality and age-appropriate content.
- Their behavior is positive.
- Screen time is balanced with other parts of life like sleep, connecting with family and friends, and time outdoors.

Growth and Development

Welcome to the joys and challenges of middle childhood (9 to 11 years old)!

Your child is probably showing more independence from the family and preferring to be with friends. Children will develop more complex friendships and peer relationships, especially of the same sex. During this time, peer pressure can start to become strong. Children who feel good about themselves are more able to resist negative peer pressure and make better choices for themselves.

This is an important time for children to gain a sense of responsibility along with their growing independence. Your child can take on chores at home and do more homework. Children can handle increasingly hard tasks in school, like reading to learn about a topic of interest, and gathering and organizing information into a book report.

Your child is also becoming more aware of their body as puberty approaches. Early signs of puberty include oily skin,



Look how much I've grown as my body changes!

acne, and body odor. Body image and eating problems sometimes start around this age. It's best to start talking about puberty with your child before it begins. For more details about puberty, see the separate brochure titled "Puberty" included in this mailing.

Take a look at these Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at bit.ly/MiddleChildhood_9-11_cdc

HPV Vaccine

HPV vaccine is cancer prevention!

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus that can cause cancers and genital, oral, and skin infections. The HPV virus is spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact. People of all genders and ages can get HPV and spread it to others without realizing they have the virus. Most people will get their first HPV infection in their late teens and early 20s.

There are many different types of HPV. Most of them do not cause infections. But, some types of HPV can cause cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus, and back of the throat. The good news is these types of cancers are preventable with the HPV vaccine! All of us can probably agree that preventing cancer is better than treating it.



Feeling strong and protected after getting vaccinated.

HPV vaccines can be given starting at age 9.

Doctors and nurses recommend the HPV vaccine for children starting at age 9 years for three big reasons.

1. The HPV vaccine works best at this age because it encourages the body to produce the most infection-fighting cells, or antibodies.
2. Getting the vaccine at age 9 also protects your child long before they ever have contact with the virus.
3. HPV vaccination is very safe. Over 15 years of data have shown that HPV vaccines are very safe and effective. And just like with all vaccines, scientists continue to monitor HPV vaccines.

The data continue to show us that the HPV vaccine works really well! In fact, HPV vaccination prevents over 90% of cancers caused by HPV. Since the vaccine was first recommended in 2006, infections that cause HPV cancers and genital warts have dropped significantly. The data is so strong that in 2022, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published their statement in PubMed, which recommends starting the HPV vaccine at age 9.

With advances in medicine, you now have the ability to protect your child from certain cancers later in life with HPV vaccine. Getting your child vaccinated as soon as they are eligible (at age 9) will increase the likelihood of being vaccinated before they ever have contact with the HPV virus. Children at age 9 should get two doses of HPV vaccine 6 to 12 months apart. Talk to your child's doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about getting them vaccinated as soon as possible. For more information about the HPV vaccine at age 9, please visit: doh.wa.gov/hpv-at-nine.

Internet Safety

- Protect your child when they're online.**
- Does your child use YouTube Kids, TikTok, Snapchat, Roblox, or other social media and online gaming platforms? If yes, talk to your kids about internet safety. Protect your child with these tips:
- Get to know the parental controls for any game, app, or website your child uses.
 - Don't allow your child to chat or accept private messages (PMs) from people they don't know. They should verify they're actually a friend in real life.
 - Don't allow your child to play behind closed doors and charge devices in a common area outside of your child's bedroom.
 - Prevent your child from making changes to their accounts by restricting access to certain settings. Set a PIN code that only you know.
 - Maintain an open line of communication so your child knows that they can and should talk to you if they see or experience anything online that doesn't seem right to them.
 - Model responsible online behavior yourself.



Supervise me to keep me safe online as part of our family screen time plan.

Nutrition and Physical Activity



We enjoy staying active and playing together!

- A healthy future starts with early habits.**
- You can help your child establish healthy behaviors now to prevent chronic diseases later. It is easier and more effective to start these healthy habits during childhood and adolescence than to try to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood.
- Did you know:
- The average child does not eat the recommended amount of fruit, vegetables, dairy, or whole grains daily.
 - Only 25% of adolescents get the recommended 60 minutes a day of physical activity.
- Children who eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein, and who move their bodies regularly are more likely to be protected from adulthood diseases like diabetes or heart disease. You can help your child lead a healthy lifestyle by choosing to:
- Set limits for screen time and develop a media use plan for your family. Use

- this Family Media Plan from Healthy Children at AAP Media Plan bit.ly/HealthyChildren_MediaPlan
- Move more. Encourage your child to participate in an hour a day of physical activities that are age appropriate, enjoyable, and offer variety! Just make sure your child is doing three types of activity at least three days per week: aerobic activity like running, muscle strengthening like climbing, and bone strengthening like jumping rope. Check out the Fact Sheet for Kids from the Move Your Way Campaign at 60 A Day: Fact Sheet for Kids bit.ly/FactSheet_Kids
 - Provide plenty of fruits and vegetables. Limit foods high in solid fats, added sugars, or salt, and prepare healthier foods for family meals. Take a look at this Healthy Eating for Kids Tip Sheet from My Plate at Healthy Eating for Kids bit.ly/HealthyEating_4Kids



Bullying at School

- Learn how to spot bullying.**
- Check in with your child daily about how things are going at school. Good communication should start well before your child is having bullying problems. The first step to dealing with bullies is knowing how to recognize when your child is being bullied. If your child doesn't tell you they are being bullied, the two most common bullying symptoms you should watch for are:
- Physical complaints such as tummy aches, as well as worries and fears.
 - Not wanting to go to school.
- Your child will want to avoid or withdraw from things that are making them stressed. If you spot these symptoms, find out what's going on. Use these tips to talk to your child:
- Ask questions and get your kids talking about their social situation. Press for more details.
 - When your child talks, really listen to what they share and keep your own emotions in check.

- Reassure and support them. Help them understand that bullying is never their fault.
- Protect your child from bullies.**
- Prepare a plan for your child to use in tough situations when it can be hard for them to think straight. Here are some suggestions:
- Practice simple and direct phrases using a strong and firm voice that your child can use to tell someone to stop bullying behavior. "Leave me alone." "Back off." "That wasn't nice."
 - Role play "what if" scenarios with your child to build their confidence and empower your child to deal with challenges.
 - Promote positive body language when facing a bully. Teach your child to hold their head up and make eye contact. Encourage them to be brave when they are being bothered. How you look when you encounter a bully is more important than what you say.
 - Encourage your child to take positive action when they see a friend or another student being bullied. Kids who speak up for one another is far more powerful than anything an adult will be able to say or do.

- Report repeated and severe bullying. Go with your child to talk to a teacher, guidance counselor, principal, or school administrator.
- Build your child's confidence. The better your child feels about themselves, the less likely the bullying will affect their self-esteem. Praise your child's progress when they tell you how they defused a bully and let them know that you're proud of them. Learn more about helping kids deal with bullies from Nemours Children's Health at kidshealth.org/en/parents/bullies.html

Thanks for reading!

Share this letter with other caregivers in your child's life. If you would like to give us feedback on this special edition letter, please send us an email at watchmegrowwa@doh.wa.gov

We hope to expand Watch Me Grow to older ages in the future, so we appreciate any feedback you are willing to provide. Thank you!