

# Send 'em back healthy

Clothes and supplies aren't kids' only needs for returning to school

BY ANNE BURKLEY • For The Patriot-News

It's early August, and that means it's time to start preparing for a new school year. Kids and parents alike tend to focus primarily on shopping for new clothes, notebooks and folders, but local experts say that the most important thing parents can send their children back to school with is health.

"Your emotional and physical health allow you to achieve the greatest part of your potential," said Dr. Sandra Ratliff, pediatrician with JDC Pediatrics in Mechanicsburg.

Families can get a healthy start to a new school year by focusing on these five areas:

## Physical exams and immunizations

It's not just a good idea to have a wellness check and physical exam before the new school year, for certain grades it's the law. Children are required to get a physical before the start of kindergarten, sixth and 11th grades and a dental exam is required before kindergarten, third and seventh grades.

A physical exam and wellness check before kindergarten is required by law for several reasons. It reassures parents and educators that all immunizations are in place for school. This exam also helps identify any disability, whether it's a chronic disease or a language delay, that would require the school to provide special care or services.

"The 11- and 12-year-old range is a good time to evaluate for a number of physical things as well as emotional issues," Ratliff said. Immunizations are scheduled to coordinate with this exam. A physical before 11th grade could detect the start of adult diseases such as hypertension and kidney disease.

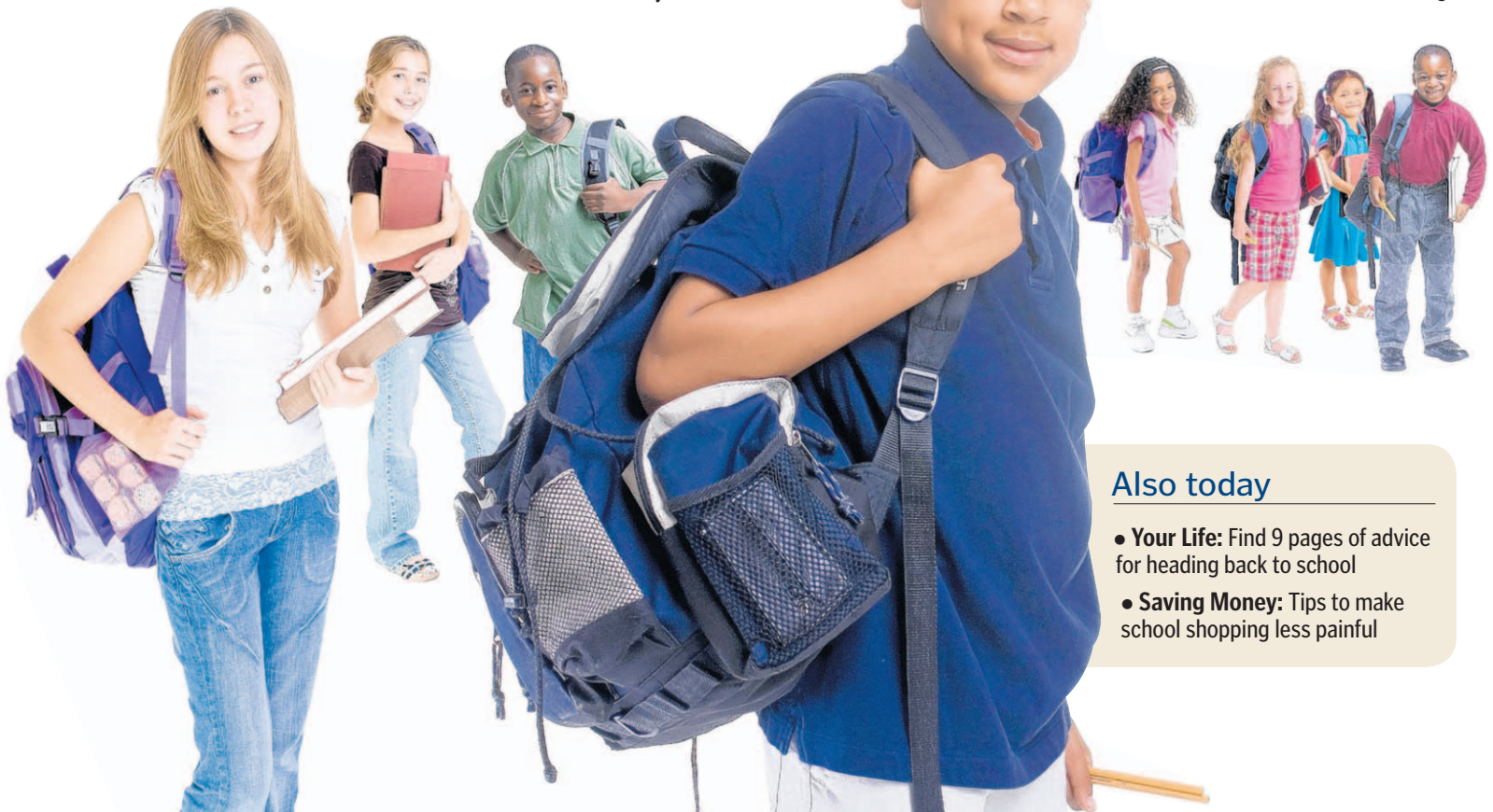
This year, parents need to be aware of changes in the immunization schedule, said Kathy Pollock, health services coordinator for Cumberland Valley School District. For attendance in all grades in 2011, children will be required to have a second dose of the chickenpox vaccine. Additionally, students entering seventh grade will need a tetanus booster if it's been five years since the last tetanus shot and a meningitis vaccination.

If parents haven't done so already, they should send in forms requesting student health updates and emergency contact information.

## Emotional health

Going back to school can be a time of great anxiety for children and teens. Parents can unwittingly contribute to this anxiety by waiting until the last minute to shop for supplies, not re-establishing school-time routines and even by down-

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