If children don’t show up for school regularly, they miss out on fundamental reading and math skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance that will carry them into college and careers. Preliminary data from a California study found that children who were chronically absent in kindergarten and 1st grade were far less likely to read proficiently at the end of 3rd grade.

Many of our youngest students miss 10 percent of the school year—about 18 days a year or just two days every month. Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten, and even preK, can predict lower test scores, poor attendance and retention in later grades, especially if the problem persists for more than a year. Do you know how many young children are chronically absent in your school or community?

Find out what day school starts and make sure your child has the required shots.

Build regular routines for bed time and the morning.

Talk about the importance of regular attendance and about how your child feels about school.

Don’t permit missing school unless your child is truly sick. Use a thermometer to check for a fever. Remember that stomach aches and headaches may be signs of anxiety.

Avoid medical appointments and extended trips when school is in session.

Keep a chart recording your child’s attendance at home. At the end of the week, talk with your child about what you see.

Develop back up plans for getting to school if something comes up. Ask a family member, neighbor or another parent for help.

Seek support from school staff or community groups to help with transportation, health problems, or no safe path to school.