

Keeping Kids Home from School: A Parents Guide

Early in the morning it is often difficult to make a decision about whether or not your child is sick enough to stay home from school. With minor symptoms you often cannot tell whether s/he is going to get better or worse during the course of the day. **Please remember the school clinic is managed by non-nursing staff. The school health assistant is not a nurse and has been trained regarding the guidelines for school attendance. Please read the guidelines below when determining if your child should attend school or stay home:**

The main reasons for keeping your child home are:

- if s/he's too sick to be comfortable at school or participate in educational activities
- if s/he might spread a contagious disease to other children

As a rule of thumb, a child should stay home if there is:

- fever of 100°F
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- frequent cough
- persistent pain (ear, stomach, head, etc.)
- widespread rash



Most of these problems need to be discussed with your child's pediatrician to determine if an office visit is needed.

The following guidelines may help in your decision process:

- **Runny nose-** is the way many children respond to pollen, dust or a cold virus. **Minor** cold or allergy symptoms should not be a reason to miss school. Many healthy children have as many as six colds per year, especially in the early school years. A child should stay home if he is too uncomfortable to complete his work and participate in other school activities.
- **Coughing-** especially if it is persistent during the day, can indicate a worsening of cold or allergy symptoms. It may be a sign of a secondary infection (sinusitis, pneumonia), which may require medical treatment. It may also indicate mild asthma. If your child's cough is worse than you might expect with a common cold, you need to consult your child's doctor. You should do so immediately if the child is not acting normal, has a fever, or has any difficulty breathing.
- **Diarrhea and vomiting-** make children uncomfortable. It could be very uncomfortable and embarrassing for your child to have another episode while in school. **A child should be symptom-free for 24 hours and be able to hold down food and fluids before returning to school.**
- **Fever-** (100°F or higher) is an important symptom – especially when it occurs along with a sore throat, nausea or a rash. Your child could have a contagious illness, which could be passed to classmates and teachers. While you can treat the fever, and usually make the child feel better temporarily, the cause of the fever (and the risk of passing it to others) is still there. **Children with fever should stay home until there is no fever for 24 hours (without taking Tylenol, Motrin, Advil, etc.).**
- **Sore throat-** consult your child's physician for advice regarding diagnosis and treatment. A child should stay home if he is too uncomfortable to complete his work and participate in other school activities. **If diagnosed with strep throat, a child may NOT return to school until 24-48 hours after the first dose of antibiotics was given and is fever-free.**
- **Pinkeye, or conjunctivitis-** can be caused by a virus, bacteria or allergy. The first two are very contagious. The eye will be reddened and a cloudy or yellow discharge is usually present. The eye may be sensitive to light. Consult with your child's doctor to see if antibiotic eye drops are needed. Again, **the child should stay home until symptoms subside and he has been on antibiotic eye drops at least 24 hours** or until the doctor recommends the child return to school.
- **Middle ear infections-** can cause great discomfort and often fever, but are not contagious to others. The child should see his doctor for diagnosis and treatment and **should stay at home if he has fever or pain.**
- **Flu-** is a contagious virus that usually occurs in the winter months. Symptoms include body aches, high fever, chills, congestion, sore throat, and, in some children, vomiting. **The child should stay home until these symptoms improve, usually five to seven days.** Consult your child's doctor for treatment suggestions to make your child more comfortable.
- **Skin Infection –** can be a staph or strep infection that creates a red, oozing blister-like area that can appear anywhere on the body. It can be passed to others by direct contact. Consult your child's doctor for treatment and length of time the child should remain out of school, especially if the area cannot be covered.

Remember to make sure that your child's school knows how to reach you during the day and that there is a back-up plan and phone number on file if they cannot reach you.