

WHEN TO KEEP SICK CHILDREN HOME FROM SCHOOL

Deciding when to keep a sick child home from school is not always easy. It's important for children to attend school and, for some parents, staying home means missing work. But when a child is truly sick, they need to stay home, in the care of an adult, to get well and to prevent spreading illness to others.

Please keep the school office up to date with current phone numbers so you or an alternate contact can be reached if your child becomes ill or injured at school.

The following information may help you decide when to keep your child at home. "Child" refers to all school-aged children including adolescents. **This information does not take the place of consulting a medical provider.** See below for "When to contact a medical provider".

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMON COLDS and THE FLU

COMMON COLD

The common cold is a contagious upper respiratory infection caused by cold viruses. Most people recover within about 7-10 days. A child with no fever, mild symptoms and otherwise feeling well may be fine at school.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:

A child with heavy cold symptoms such as deep or uncontrollable coughing or significant lack of energy belongs at home even without a fever. See additional information on fever, sore throat and influenza.

FLU (INFLUENZA)

The flu is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses and can cause mild to severe illness.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:

Those with flu-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay home even if they are prescribed antiviral medications until they no longer have a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines (Tylenol or Ibuprofen).

Signs and Symptoms	Common Cold	Flu (Influenza)
Symptom Onset	Symptoms come on gradually	Symptoms come on quickly
Fever	Rare	Usual; lasts 3-4 days
Aches	Slight	Usual; often severe
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly common
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Usual
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can be severe
Headache	Rare	Common

Symptom	Description	When to Keep a Child Home from School:
Cough	A mild hacking cough often starts after the first few days of a cold. A child with mild symptoms, no fever and otherwise feeling well may be fine at school.	A child with cough and fever must stay home from school for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicine (Tylenol or Ibuprofen).
Diarrhea/Vomiting		Children who have vomited or had diarrhea should be kept home and should return to school only after being symptom-free for 24 hours.
Ear Ache	Consult a medical provider for ear aches. Ear infections may require medical treatment.	A child should be kept home until fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medicine.
Fever	Fevers are a common symptom of viral and bacterial infections. A fever is a temperature of 100°F orally or 99°F under the arm.	Any child with a fever of 100°F or higher should not attend school and should not return until they have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines (Tylenol or Ibuprofen).
Headache	A child whose only complaint is a mild headache usually does not need to stay home from school. Complaints of frequent or more severe headache should be evaluated by a medical provider, including vision exam, if needed.	A child with a significant headache belongs at home until feeling better.
Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)	A common infectious disease of one or both eyes caused by several types of bacteria and viruses.	Any child with redness of eyes and/or eyelids with thick white or yellow eye discharge and eye pain should stay at home until appropriate treatment has been initiated for 24 hours unless doctor has diagnosed a noninfectious conjunctivitis (please bring a note from the doctor to school).
Sore Throat	A child with a mild sore throat, no fever and otherwise feeling well may be fine to attend school.	A child diagnosed with strep throat is no longer contagious and can return to school 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has been started <u>and</u> the child is fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications.
Frequent Symptoms	Sometimes children pretend or exaggerate illness in order to stay home. However, frequent complaints of tummy aches, headaches and other symptoms may be a physical sign that a child is feeling emotionally stressed, a common experience even in children. Consult a medical provider to evaluate symptoms. Stress-based complaints cause some children to unnecessarily miss a great deal of school. It is important to check often with your children about how things are going. Share concerns with school staff so they can provide support for you and your child to help make attending school a positive experience.	

WHEN TO CONTACT A MEDICAL PROVIDER

Be sure to contact a medical provider any time there is a concern about a child's health.

In children, EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS for flu-like illness that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Not waking up or interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

Other reasons to contact a medical provider include, but are not exclusive to:

- When a child looks or acts really sick, with or without a fever
- Cold symptoms for longer than 10-14 days or getting sicker or there is a fever after the first few days
- Chronic coughing; uncontrollable coughing; wheezing
- Rashes; eye drainage; earache; toothache

HEALTHY HABITS to STAY WELL and PREVENT SPREADING GERMS

- **WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN** with soap and water especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** to help prevent the spread of viruses.
- **Don't share** food, utensils, beverages or anything that might be contaminated with germs.
- **Try to avoid close contact with sick people.**
- **Stay home when sick**, especially with flu-like symptoms of fever and cough. Stay home for at least 24 hours after being fever free without the use of fever-reducing medications (Tylenol and Ibuprofen).
- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.** Throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- **Wear a mask if you're asked.**
- **Clean surfaces that may be contaminated with germs** using household disinfectant cleaners.
- **Get a flu shot every year to help prevent seasonal flu.**

References

CDC Features. (2017, February 06). Retrieved December 22, 2017, from <https://www.cdc.gov/features/rhinoviruses/index.html>

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