

When is my child too ill to attend school?

When your child is not feeling well, you, as the parent, get to make the decision as to what to do next. When it comes to sending your child to school, here are a few tips to help you make that decision:

COLDS:

Keep a child with a cold at home only if he feels too tired to complete his morning activities or he has a fever (greater than 100.4°). Kids are most contagious the first day of the cold—teach the child to blow/wipe his own nose, wash his hands, and cover his mouth when coughing. Because we cannot keep our kids out of school every time they get a cold, have a cold, or recover from a cold, learning good hygiene (hand-washing) is important. Call your doctor if the cold is worse after a week, if your child is having trouble breathing, or if he develops other symptoms.

COUGHS:

Keep her home if a cough keeps your child up at night, appears to get worse as her activity level increases, or if she has other symptoms, such as a fever. You can send her to school if the cough is lingering from a cold and she feels okay otherwise.

FEVER:

Children should be without a fever for 24 hours before returning to school. In a borderline case, go by how the child looks and acts. A child who seems pale, achy, and tired but has a temperature of only 100 degrees should still stay home. Consider a doctor's visit if the fever is accompanied by other symptoms such as tiredness, sore throat, earache, etc.

EAR INFECTIONS:

Monitor your child if he complains of ear pain or tugs at his ear. If this pain continues, see your medical provider. Ear infections are common in young children. If your child has an ear infection, he may return to school if able to participate in the daily activities. If he is lethargic, it may be a good idea to keep him home until he feels better.

SORE THROAT:

If your child wakes up with a sore throat but no other symptoms, offer him juice or water to see if the discomfort was simply from dry air or post-nasal drip during the night. If he has a fever and the pain continues, call his doctor. Strep throat and other throat infections can only be determined by a throat swab and/or throat culture. If your child has Strep, he can return to school after being on antibiotics and without a fever for 24 hours.

VOMITING AND DIARRHEA:

A child who is throwing up needs to stay home. Do not send him back to school until vomiting has ceased and he is fever-free. If he is passing frequent, watery, foul-smelling stools, keep him home and let him rest. Children can return to school once the fever is gone, the stool frequency has returned to normal, and the child has control over his bowel movements, even if loose. Call the doctor if your child is both vomiting and having diarrhea or has a severe case of either.

PINKEYE:

A child with bacterial conjunctivitis is highly contagious and should be kept home until he has been on prescription eye drops or ointment for 24 hours. When tearing and mattering are no longer present, it's appropriate for a child to return to school or child care. If he wakes up and the whites of his eyes are red, there is pus discharge, and/or the eyelashes are matted shut, call his health care provider.

HEAD LICE:

A physician's visit is not necessary, but please notify the school nurse so an appropriate classroom lice check can be conducted. Lice lay eggs (nits) that attach to the shaft of the hair. Shampoos (pediculocides) can be purchased over-the-counter. Follow the instructions exactly on the box. All nits must be removed from the hair before the child can be re-admitted to class.

RASHES:

The following rashes are contagious: chickenpox, impetigo, scarlet fever, measles, fifth disease, ring worm, and scabies. Please contact the school nurse if your child is diagnosed with any of these illnesses. Visit your doctor if the rash spreads, does not improve, is accompanied by a fever, or is from an unknown cause.

SPRAINED ANKLE:

Elevate the ankle and apply ice for 20 minutes every hour until your child can walk comfortably on it. If you suspect a fracture (swelling, bruising, pain), call your doctor. Only an x-ray can diagnose a fracture. A doctor's note is required to bring crutches to school.

The above information is only a guide to common childhood health concerns. Call your school nurse or personal health care provider for more information. Always bring a copy of a physician's note to school and/or notify the school if your child will have an extended absence due to a health condition for 10 days or longer.

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