

Is Your Child too Sick for School?

Early in the morning, it can be difficult to know whether your child is sick enough to stay home from school. With minor symptoms, you often cannot tell whether he is going to get better or worse during the day.

The main reasons for keeping your child home are:

- He is too sick to be comfortable at school.
- He might get other children sick.

Your child should stay home if he has:

- A fever higher than 100.4°F
- Vomited more than once
- Diarrhea (loose stool)
- Frequent cough
- Constant pain (ear, stomach, etc.)
- A rash that has spread

If your child often complains of pain that causes him to miss school, he may be avoiding school. Talk with his doctor before your child misses too many days.

If he does not have a fever, your child may go to school with a mild cough, runny nose or other cold signs.

Talk to your child's doctor if he has any of these problems:

A runny nose can be caused by pollen, dust or a cold. Mild cold or allergy signs should not be a reason to miss school. Healthy children may have as many as six colds a year, especially in the early school years.

Coughing that continues or gets worse may be a sign of a second infection, such as sinusitis or pneumonia. These infections need medical treatment. It also may be a sign of mild asthma. Talk to his doctor if your child's cough is worse than you would expect with a cold. Call the doctor right away if your child is acting differently, has a fever, shortness of breath with activity or trouble breathing.

Diarrhea and vomiting can cause a lot of discomfort. Diarrhea alone can be enough to keep your child at home. It may be embarrassing and uncomfortable for your child to have diarrhea at school. Call the doctor if diarrhea or vomiting happens a lot and your child also has fever, rash, pain or weakness. Keep him out of school until the illness passes.

Fever (higher than 100.4°F) is an important sign—especially when it happens with a sore throat, nausea or rash. Your child may have an illness that can be passed to others. While you can treat the fever and make your child feel better, the illness (and the risk of passing it to others) is still there. Children with fever should stay home until there is no fever without medicine for 24 hours.

Strep and scarlet fever are caused by the same bacterial infection and can be passed to others. Signs include sudden sore throat and fever, stomachache and headache. With scarlet fever, a rash usually shows up within 12 to 48 hours. Call your child's doctor right away if he has any of these signs. Your child should stay home until he does not have a fever and has been taking antibiotics for 24 hours.

Pinkeye, or conjunctivitis, can be caused by a virus, bacteria or allergy. The first two can be passed to others. The white part of your child's eye may be red. You may see a cloudy or yellow eye discharge. Light might hurt his eyes. The doctor may give your child antibiotic eye drops. Ask your child's doctor when he can return to school.

Middle ear infections can cause pain and fever. They cannot be passed to others. Your child should see his doctor and should stay at home if he has fever or pain.

The flu is a virus that always occurs in the winter. It is easily passed to others. A child has the flu always has a fever (main symptom) plus one or more of the following.

- Body aches
- Chills
- Congestion
- Sore throat
- Vomiting

For example, your child may have a fever with body aches and congestion, but no vomiting. This is still the flu. Your child should stay home until he feels better and his fever is gone for 24 hours without taking fever medicine. Call your child's doctor for treatment tips. Everyone age six months and older should get a flu vaccine every year.

Impetigo is a staph or strep infection. It causes red blisters that can be anywhere on the body or face. Pus drains from the blisters. A honey-colored crust may appear on the area. It can be passed to others by direct contact. Call your child's doctor for treatment. Your child can return to school after he has been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

Chickenpox is a virus. It causes fever and an itchy rash. The rash spreads all over the body, changing from red bumps to sores, then scabs. Your child should stay home until all bumps have scabs and no new bumps have formed for two days. The virus can be passed to others at least two days before the rash starts, so you need to let his school and playmates know if your child is sick. Call your child's doctor for treatment tips. There is a vaccine for children who have not had chickenpox. Kindergarteners and all sixth-graders who have not had chickenpox must get the vaccine.

Scabies are small insects that dig into the skin. They cause itching and can be passed to others. See your child's doctor for treatment tips right away. Your child should stay home from school until scabies are treated and for 24 hours after treatment.

Lice are tiny, wingless insects that live on the scalp. They cause itching and can be passed to others. Call your child's doctor for treatment tips right away. Your child should stay home from school until he has one lice shampoo treatment and all live lice are removed. Lice nits or eggs should be removed with a fine-tooth comb. Nits alone should not be a reason to stay home from school after treatment. Nits cannot be passed to others. Check your child's head for 10 to 14 days to make sure no new lice have hatched. Tell your child not to share combs, brushes, hats or other clothing.

Hand-washing is the best way to stop the spread of infection. Call your child's doctor if you are not sure if he should stay home from school. **Make sure your child's school knows how to reach you during the day and that there is a backup plan if the school cannot reach you.**

This is general information and is not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.