



Your Child: Too Sick for School?

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A little snuffle. A slight cough. "I don't feel good," says your child. Should your child stay home, go to school, or go to the doctor immediately?

Usually, if your child has cold symptoms, the deciding factor is whether she has a fever too, experts say. If there's no fever, it's probably just a cold. So long as your child feels pretty healthy otherwise, it's fine to send her off to school.

Symptom by symptom, here are some guidelines to help you decide whether your child should stay home from school:

Fever

Fever is a common symptom of viral infections, like influenza. If your child's temperature is 100.4 degrees or higher, keep your child at home. While at home, encourage your child to drink plenty of liquids.

If you have concerns about your child's health, get in touch with her pediatrician. If there have been cases of flu at school, or if your child came into contact with someone who had it, your pediatrician needs to know. Your doctor may recommend tests and possibly treatment with antiviral drugs.

A child should be fever-free for 24 hours (without medicine) before returning to school.

Mild Cough/Runny Nose

If there's no fever and the child feels fairly good, school is fine.

Bad Cough/Cold Symptoms

Children with bad coughs need to stay home and possibly see a doctor. It could be a severe cold or possibly bronchitis, flu, or pneumonia. But when the cough improves and the child is feeling better, then it's back to school. Don't wait for the cough to disappear entirely -- that could take a week or longer!

Diarrhea or Vomiting

Keep your child home until the illness is over, and for 24 hours after the last episode (without medicine). Though diarrhea and vomiting are not usually associated with flu, they may sometimes occur with swine flu.

Sore Throat

A minor sore throat is usually not a problem, but a severe sore throat could be strep throat even if there is no fever. Other symptoms of strep throat in children are headache and stomach upset. Keep your child home from school and contact a doctor. Your child needs a special test to determine if it is strep throat. He or she can return to school 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins.

Earache

The child needs to see a doctor.

**Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)**

Keep the child home until a doctor has given the OK to return to school. Pink eye is highly contagious and most cases are caused by a virus, which will not respond to an antibiotic. Bacterial conjunctivitis will require an antibiotic; your doctor will be able to determine if this is the case.

Rash

Children with a skin rash should see a doctor, as this could be one of several infectious diseases. One possibility is impetigo, a bacterial skin infection that is very contagious and requires antibiotic treatment.

