



How Sick is Too Sick?

Tips for deciding if your child should stay home from school or daycare

As parents we are familiar with the ongoing running noses and sniffles of wintertime. However, we are often less familiar with the criteria to use when deciding whether or not to send our child to school / daycare or to cancel activities for the day. The purpose of this article is to offer some guidelines to help you decide when your child should stay home from school or activities.

Ultimately, the goal is to keep children at home who are the most contagious or who are unable to withstand the rigors of a school day. Please note that this is not an exact science and school policies may differ.

As a rule of thumb, if your child has a significant enough symptom (i.e. cough, decreased activity) that would most likely warrant a call home from the school or daycare facility, it is probably best to keep him/her home that day.

Below please find some basic guidelines for specific signs and symptoms:

- **Fever:** Your child may return to school if he/she has had no fever in the last 24 hours. Even if your child has no fever in the morning, many children who are still contagious with fevers will only exhibit fevers at night. Therefore, waiting the full 24 hours after a fever is recommended.

A fever is a temperature measured by **oral/rectal route of at least 100.4 degrees**. Other routes of measuring temperature such as the ear or under the arm are less reliable and can underestimate the true temperature.

- **Colds:** Children with cold symptoms (i.e. congestion, mild runny nose or cough) but without fever and who generally appear well may usually return to school. Note: Though children with cold symptoms are probably contagious early on, most schools allow these children to participate since too many missed school days would occur otherwise.
- **Rash:** Only contagious rashes necessitate a child staying home from school. Fortunately, this makes up only a minority of rashes. Examples of contagious rashes include moderate to severe cases of impetigo that can not be covered with clothing or a bandage and chicken pox that is not fully crusted over.
- **Gastrointestinal:** Children that are vomiting (2 or more unexplained times in the previous 24 hours) should remain out of school. Children with diarrhea that is not easily contained within the diaper/toilet or that contains blood or mucus should remain out of school.
- **Pink eye:** Most cases of pink eye are contagious but do **not** benefit from eye drops. Those that benefit from antibiotic eye drops usually have an eye discharge that is more purulent (i.e. thicker and more colorful) and should be on prescription eye drops for 1

day prior to returning to school. If allowed by the school, children with mild eye infections should be able to return to school without eye drops.

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