



Feeling Sick? When To Stay Home

With all the stomachaches and sniffles that come along with childhood, it can be hard to know when to keep a sick child home from school.

Most schools have policies that spell out how sick is too sick to go to class. Although policies vary from one community to the next, in general, children should go to school if they have cold symptoms without a fever and stay home if they have an infectious condition or a cold with fever. In addition, students should stay home if they have any of the following:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Coughs that produce phlegm
- Thick, yellow nasal discharge
- Fever of more than 100 degrees

Among the most common illnesses seen by school nurses are the flu, impetigo, conjunctivitis, head lice, and pertussis, according to Susan Marley, an executive committee member with the National Association of School Nurses. She recommends the following for these common conditions:

Flu: Children MUST stay home until they go at least 24 hours, unmedicated, without a fever.

Impetigo: This bacterial skin infection forms open sores and crusty scabs, usually on the face, arms, or legs. If your child has an open sore that you suspect is impetigo, it should be checked by a doctor before coming to school.

Conjunctivitis (pinkeye): Pinkeye may be caused by a virus or bacteria or may result from an allergic reaction. See a doctor to determine whether your child's pinkeye is contagious.

Head lice: If you think your child might have head lice, have the school nurse take a look. If evidence of lice is found, your child should stay home until all lice and nits have been removed.

Pertussis (whooping cough): Because pertussis is highly contagious, you should take your child to the doctor right away if you suspect that your child has it.

Ringworm: Have the school nurse check out possible cases of ringworm and determine whether the child needs to see a doctor. If a diagnosis of ringworm is confirmed, the child should be treated before going back to school.

In addition to following these guidelines when your child is sick, consider your child's ability to interact with others and pay attention in class. Even if a child is recovering from an illness and is technically well enough to go to school, it may be in the child's best interest to stay home and rest, Marley says. "If they're still very sleepy and irritable," she says, "they're going to have a harder time learning and socializing in school."