

When Should You Keep Your Child Home From School?

Here's expert advice from Steven Parker, MD (pediatrician from Boston Medical Center) and Cindy Devore, MD (school physician in Monroe County, NY)

A little snuffle. A slight cough. "I don't feel good," says your child. But how do you really know: Should this child stay home, or go to school?

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

Fever: If your child's temperature is 100.4 degrees or higher, keep your child home and encourage him/her to drink plenty of fluids. **Your child should be fever free for 24 hours (without medicine) before returning to school**

Mild Cough/Runny Nose: If there is **no fever** & your 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, bronchitis, flu or pneumonia. When the cough improves and the child feels better, then it's back to school.

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 & stomach upset. Keep your child home, and contact a doctor. Your child needs a special test to determine if it is strep throat. **He/she can return to school 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins.**

Diarrhea or Vomiting: Keep your child home until the illness is over, and **for 24 hours after the last episode (without medicine).**

Earache: Your child needs to see a doctor.

Pink Eye/Conjunctivitis: Your child will need to see a doctor who will determine if he/she needs an antibiotic. Pink eye is highly contagious. Your doctor will tell you when it's okay for your child to return to school.

Rash: Children with a skin rash should see a doctor, as this could be one of several infectious diseases. For example:

1. Impetigo is a bacterial skin infection that is very contagious. Signs & symptoms are typically open sores or lesions around the nose & mouth.
2. Fifth Disease is a contagious viral illness that is spread by coughs & sneezes. It shows up often as a lace-like rash on the cheeks.
3. Chicken Pox is a viral infection that has an itchy blister-like rash.

With cold & flu season in full swing, here are some important pointers to help prevent the spread of infection. Remind & show your children to discard used tissues promptly, not to share personal items, to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, and to wash their hands thoroughly and often with soap & warm water.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call Mrs. Margie Tierney, RN at the High School at 585-7400, ext. 1114, or Mrs. Joanne Bartlett, RN, at the Elementary/Middle School at 585-7400, ext. 2213.