

## IS YOUR CHILD TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL?

The main reasons for keeping your child home are:

- He/she is too sick to be comfortable at school.
- He/she might spread a contagious disease to other children.

As a rule of thumb, a child **should not** be in school if he/she has:

- A fever higher than 100.4
- Vomited, more than once
- Diarrhea
- A very frequent cold
- Persistent pain (ear, stomach, etc.)
- A widespread rash

Many of these problems may need to be discussed with your child's pediatrician to determine if an office visit is needed.

The following guidelines may help in your decision process:

**A runny nose** is the way many children respond to pollen, dust or a cold virus. Minor cold or allergy symptoms should not be a reason to miss school. If symptoms persist, a visit to the pediatrician may be necessary.

**Coughing**, especially if it is persistent during the day, can indicate a worsening of cold or allergy symptoms. It may be a sign of a secondary infection which may require medical treatment. It may also indicate mild asthma. If your child's cough is worse, than you might expect with a common cold, you need to consult your child's doctor.

**Diarrhea and vomiting** make children very uncomfortable. A single episode of vomiting, without any other symptoms, may not be reason enough for the child to miss school, but be sure the school can reach you if symptoms occur again during the day. A single episode of watery diarrhea probably warrants not going to school. If diarrhea and/or vomiting are frequent or are accompanied by fever, rash or general weakness, consult your child's doctor and keep the child out of school until the illness passes.

**Fever** (generally considered to be higher than 100.4) is an important symptom-especially when it occurs along with a sore throat, nausea or a rash. Your child could have a contagious illness, which could be passed to classmates and teachers. While you treat the fever, and usually make

the child feel better temporarily, the cause of the fever (and the risk of passing it to others) is still there. Children with fever should stay home until there is no fever for 24 hours.

**Strep throat and scarlet fever** are two highly contagious conditions caused by the same bacterial infection. They usually arrive with a sudden complaint of sore throat and fever, a rash usually appears within 12 to 48 hours. A child with these symptoms should see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment and should remain out of school until he/she is without fever and has been on antibiotics for 24 hours.

**Pinkeye/conjunctivitis**, can be caused by a **virus, bacteria, or allergy**. The first two (viral and bacterial) are very contagious. The eye will be reddened, and a cloudy or yellow discharge is usually present. The eye may be sensitive to light. Consult your child's doctor to see if antibiotic eye drops are needed. Again, your child should stay home until symptoms subside and he/she has been on antibiotic eye drops at least **24 hours** or until the doctor recommends your child return to school.

**Flu** is a contagious virus that usually occurs in the winter months. Symptoms include body aches, high fever, chills, congestion, sore throat and, in some children, vomiting. Your child should stay home until these symptoms improve, usually five to seven days.

**Impetigo** is a staph or strep infection that creates a red, oozing blister-like area that can appear anywhere on the body or face. A honey-colored crust may appear on the area. It can be passed to others by direct contact. Consult your child's doctor for treatment and length of time your child should remain out of school, especially if the area cannot be covered.

**Chickenpox** is a highly contagious viral illness. It causes fever and an itchy rash, which spreads quickly all over the body, changing from red bumps to blister-like lesions, then scabs. Your child needs to stay home until all bumps are scabbed and no new bumps have appeared for two days. Your child is contagious at least two days before the rash starts, so you need to let the school and playmates know, and consult your child's doctor for treatment of symptoms.

**Scabies and lice** brought into a school can quickly produce an epidemic of itching and scratching. Scabies are tiny insects that burrow into the skin and cause severe itching. Lice are tiny wingless insects, like ticks, that thrive on the warm scalps of children and cause itching. Both should be treated immediately, with advice from your child's doctor. Children need to stay home from school until head lice are dead and until nits or eggs are removed with a special fine comb. Head checks should continue for 10 to 14 days. Caution your child against sharing combs, brushes, hats or other clothing. In the case of scabies, children should stay home for 24 hours after treatment.