

WHEN TO KEEP SICK CHILDREN HOME FROM SCHOOL

From M. Haley RN, Public Health and School Nurse 9/12

Deciding when to keep a sick child at home is not always easy. It's important for children to attend school, and for some parents staying home means missing work. But when a child is truly ill, they need to be home in the care of an adult to rest, recover and prevent the spread of illness to others. This information may help you decide when to keep your child at home. "Child" refers to all school-aged children, including adolescents. Consult a medical provider when there are concerns about your child's health.

COLD SYMPTOMS: A child with mild cough and cold symptoms, no fever and otherwise feeling well may attend school. Remind them to use and dispose of tissues properly and to wash hands frequently.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Children with heavy cold symptoms such as deep or frequent coughing and a significant lack of energy belong at home.

DIARRHEA/VOMITING:

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: It is important to keep children at home for 24 hours after the last episode of diarrhea or vomiting.

EAR ACHES:

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Never ignore an earache. Keep your child home and consult with a medical provider.

FEVER: Fever is a common symptom of viral or bacterial infection that may be contagious to others. A thermometer is the best way to check. If there is no thermometer, watch for symptoms like fatigue, headache, shivering, sweating, dehydration and skin much warmer than usual.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Students with a fever of 100°F or higher must not attend school, and should not return until they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication. Consult with a health care provider.

FREQUENT SYMPTOMS: Sometimes children pretend or exaggerate illness to stay home. However, frequent complaints of tummy aches, headaches and other symptoms may be a physical sign that a child is feeling emotionally stressed, a common experience even in children. Stress-based complaints cause some children to unnecessarily miss a great deal of school. It is important to: check in often with your children about how things are going; share concerns with school staff; and consult a medical provider to evaluate symptoms.

HEADACHES: A child whose only complaint is a mild headache usually does not need to stay home from school. Complaints of frequent or more severe headaches should be evaluated by a medical provider.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child with significant headache pain belongs at home until feeling better.

HEAD LICE - A COMMON CHILDHOOD NUISANCE: Head lice are tiny crawling insects that live only on the human scalp. They are not a health hazard and do not transmit disease. They rarely fall from the head, and will die within 24 hours without a human host. Most often they spread by head-to-head contact with a person who has head lice. An itchy scalp is the most common symptom. Adult lice are reddish brown, the size of a sesame seed and hard to see. Lice lay nits (eggs) on strands of hair close to the scalp, are easier to see, look like tiny tan or white dots, and are firmly attached to hair. Nits can easily be found near the scalp behind ears and the back of the neck. Check your child's scalp about once/month and if they complain of an itchy scalp. Treat right away if lice or nits are found. www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/ - www.headlice.org/ - www.robicomb.com

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: If nits or lice are found, keep your child home for a maximum of two school days to provide initial treatment. Follow with careful inspection and nit removal for at least 14 days for the best success. Over the counter or prescription treatments may also be helpful.