

When can my child return to school?



Children's
Healthcare of Atlanta

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

Is your child too sick for childcare or school?

It is often hard to decide early in the morning if your child is too sick to go to his childcare center or school. It can be hard to tell if minor symptoms will get better or worse during the day.

Use these guidelines to help you decide when to keep your child home. **Check with your child's school for more specific guidelines.**

Illness	Contagious?	Symptoms	When to return to childcare or school
Chickenpox	Yes – spread by direct contact with fluid inside blisters or with droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Red, itchy rash on body – changes from bumps to blisters to scabs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child's doctor about treatment for your child. • Keep your child home until all the bumps have scabs and no new bumps appear for 2 days. • Tell the school and playmates' parents if your child gets chickenpox. • Children who have not yet had chickenpox should receive 2 shots (vaccines) to protect them from the disease.
Colds	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny nose • Scratchy throat • Cough <p>NOTE: These symptoms may also be caused by allergies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may go to childcare with minor cold symptoms. • If symptoms are worse than you might expect with a common cold, call your child's doctor. Call right away if your child is not acting normally, has a fever or has any trouble breathing.
Fever	Depends on cause	Temperature over 100.3°F	Keep your child home until there is no fever without using fever-reducing medicines for 24 hours.
Flu	Yes – spread by contact with droplets from eyes, mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Chills • Cold symptoms • Body aches • Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea 	<p>Keep your child home until there is no fever without using fever-reducing medicines for 24 hours and symptoms subside. This is usually for 5 to 7 days.</p> <p>NOTE: Everyone 6 months and older should receive a flu shot each year.</p>

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

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Illness	Contagious?	Symptoms	When to return to childcare or school
Impetigo or MRSA	Yes – spread by direct contact	Red, oozing, blister-like rash on body or face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover all involved areas until completely healed. Avoid all close contact activities until all lesions are scabbed over.
Middle ear infections	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ear pain Fever 	Your child may attend school if comfort level allows.
Pinkeye	Yes – spread by bacteria or virus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watery eyes Itchy eyes Redness in whites of eyes Puffy eyelids Drainage from eyes <p>NOTE: These symptoms may also be caused by allergies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat your child’s pinkeye as advised by his doctor. This may include antibiotics. Your child may return to school after 24 hours of treatment.
Ringworm	<p>Yes – spread by direct contact</p> <p>Ringworm can affect the skin or scalp.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skin – pink, raised patches and mild itching Scalp – flaky or crusty patches and hair loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat your child’s skin or scalp as advised by his doctor. For skin – keep patches covered with a bandage. For scalp – teach your child not to share hats, brushes, combs, clothing or linens. Your child may return to school once treatment is started.
Scabies and lice	<p>Yes – spread by direct contact</p> <p>Scabies affects the skin; lice affect the scalp.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Itching Scratching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat your child’s skin or scalp right away as advised by his doctor. For scabies – keep your child home until treatment is started. For lice - check your child’s head for active lice for 7 to 10 days. Re-treat as needed. Teach your child not to share hats, brushes, combs, clothing or linens.

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Illness	Contagious?	Symptoms	When to return to childcare or school
Strep throat or scarlet fever	Yes – spread by contact with droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sore throat • Fever • Headache • Stomachache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until there is no fever and he has received antibiotics for 24 hours (if antibiotics are prescribed).
Vomiting or diarrhea	Depends on cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomits more than one time • Loose, runny stools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until there is no fever without using fever-reducing medicines for 24 hours and symptoms subside. • For vomiting – also keep your child home until he has not vomited for at least 24 hours. • For diarrhea – also keep your child home until he has not had diarrhea for at least 24 hours. This includes children who wear diapers.

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