

# GFPS Illness and Surveillance Protocols

## General Health and Wellness Promotion:

Health promotion and education are essential roles of the school nurse, as supported by the National Association of School Nurses' *School Nursing Practice Framework*. Under the principle of Community/Public Health, the school nurse should participate in active illness surveillance, health promotion, and disease prevention. The school nurse will work to promote health practices like hand hygiene, staying home when you are sick, and promoting vaccination compliance. The school nurse is also the health expert of the school who can work to share evidence-based education materials with students and staff.

## Illness assessment and exclusion:

The school nurse will use their assessment skills and critical thinking decision making when assessing a child who presents ill during the school day. The GFPS Nursing Department will rely on the guidance of the MT DPHHS Communicable Disease Guide along with other resources provided in this document. Nurses are encouraged to always use evidence-based practice in their decision making. Parents are, of course, an important part of this decision making process and nurses will work collaboratively with parents to educate them on illness trends, symptoms, home care and potential need for further evaluation.

## General Exclusion Criteria:

### **From MT DPHHS Communicable Disease: A Guide for Schools in MT:**

#### **Exclusion Criteria for Children Who Are Ill:**

*"According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, when a child becomes ill but does not require immediate medical help, a determination must be made about whether the child should be sent home. Most illnesses do not require exclusion. The designated staff member should determine whether the child's illness meets the following criteria for exclusion:*

- ***Prevents the child from participating comfortably in activities as determined by staff members of the early education/child care program or school.***
- ***Results in a need for care that is greater than staff members can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.***
- ***Poses a risk of spreading harmful disease to others, or is on the list of specific conditions requiring exclusion.***

*If any of these criteria are met, the child should be excluded, regardless of the type of illness, unless a health professional determines the child's condition does not require exclusion."*

Nurses will be encouraged to use the "Signs and Symptoms" chart along with the "Diseases A-Z" chart in the above mentioned guide to further assist with questions. The following guidance is provided within the department to support District health and wellness practices:

### **Symptom-based guidance:**

**Fever:** Defined as a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees. May or may not present with other signs of illness. If a student presents with a fever and signs of illness or meets criteria above they should be sent home. In addition, medical evaluation may be recommended if fever is accompanied by ear pain, tooth pain, rash, sore throat, or severe abdominal pain (Attendance Works, 2018). Students may present with fever as a side effect of recent vaccinations or other chronic health conditions. When a student presents with a fever and no other signs of illness, the nurse should still notify parent/guardian to discuss health history and potential need for treatment with antipyretics.

- May return after 24 hours fever free without the use of antipyretics.

**Vomiting:** The nurse may assess a student and determine if vomiting was episodic or has other cause than potential illness (i.e. exercise induced.) If vomiting is associated with other signs of illness (i.e. fever, diarrhea) or they have had more than 2 episodes within 24 hours, exclusion is recommended.

- The general guidance for return is when the child can keep food and liquids down and has had no emesis (vomiting) for 24 hours (Cleveland Clinic 2023).
- Additionally, if the child is sent home or kept home for one isolated event of vomiting and the child successfully eats and drinks with no further emesis, then the child may return to school the following morning (CDC, 2024).

**Diarrhea:** One episode of diarrhea may not indicate severe illness in a student. If diarrhea continues and/or the student meets exclusion criteria above then the nurse may consider sending the student home. Exclusion would be recommended if there is blood in the stool, the diarrhea is accompanied by fever and/or vomiting, or if the child has more than 2 loose stools above their normal bowel patterns in a 24 hour period (CDC, 2024). If a child is not potty trained and stool is not contained to their diapers then exclusion would be recommended until resolved. If a child is potty trained, but diarrhea is causing them to have accidents then it would be advisable to send them home.

\*If there has been an identified "outbreak" or trend of GI illnesses suggestive of a communicable disease, such as Norovirus, then the nurse should consider exclusion and advising family of potential risk of infection.

- May return when, “diarrhea has improved, the child is no longer having accidents or is having bowel movements no more than 2 above normal per 24-hour period for the child. Bloody diarrhea should be evaluated by a healthcare provider prior to return,” (CDC, 2024).

**General respiratory symptoms:** There are many childhood illnesses and viruses that may present with coughing, runny nose, and general cold-like symptoms. The nurse may use their knowledge of potential illness trends in their school or community to work with the family and assess a student to the best of their ability. If the student meets general exclusion criteria the nurse will communicate with the family to help identify appropriate courses of action and return to school protocol. The general guidance from the CDC states that if respiratory virus symptoms are worsening and not improving or not explained by another cause, such as seasonal allergies, then exclusion may be recommended. Respiratory virus symptoms can include: cough, fever, chills, runny nose, headache, and other symptoms (CDC, 2024) . If the nurse has reason to believe symptoms could be related to a vaccine preventable disease, such as Pertussis, then appropriate testing or referral should be made.

- Individuals may return when fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication and their symptoms are demonstrating improvement. The CDC provides general recommendations to prevent further spread of respiratory illness for individuals to practice enhanced hand hygiene, consider masking when around others, practice social distancing, and taking steps for cleaner air when indoors, (CDC 2024).

Addressing questions about COVID-19, Influenza and RSV: At this time GFPS does not perform or provide any laboratory testing for any specific diseases, including COVID-19. If a nurse suspects that an individual may be at risk for being infected with a communicable disease, they can make recommendations for testing, taking into consideration a person’s medical history and risk factors. If an individual receives testing for a communicable disease by a healthcare provider it is recommended that they seek recommendation from their healthcare provider regarding when they can safely return to school/work. If a person is diagnosed and does not receive this guidance the school nurse may be able to help by contacting the local health department or utilizing communicable disease guidance resources. If there is no diagnosis then the recommendation is to follow the return to school guidance in this document. It is always advisable that staff members consult their primary care provider for questions regarding potential treatment for any communicable disease.

## General Practices for Illness Surveillance and Reporting of Communicable Disease

GFPS Nurses will continue to promote health and safety of schools through illness surveillance and monitoring in the following ways.

**Tracking Illness Trends:** GFPS Nurses should communicate with attendance secretaries/administrative assistants and request notification when a student is reported to have a communicable disease. Examples of communicable disease include, but are not limited to Strep Throat, Mononucleosis, NoroVirus and Influenza. It is not required that attendance secretaries ask about a student's symptoms or medical history, and any further medical questions should be referred to the school nurse.

**Communicating Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria:** School nurses will follow up with families of reported students to ensure they understand proper criteria and timeframes for returning to school.

**Communicable Disease Outbreaks:**

Nurses will follow the requirements of reporting communicable diseases identified in ARM 37.114.203 to local health department officials. If there is a confirmed exposure of reportable communicable disease within a school, then the school nurse will work with a representative of the local health department to assist them to follow any required protocols. This may include contact tracing and notification of close contacts. The health department would be in charge of executing the recommended contact tracing and notifying any identified close contacts with any further medical guidance.

**References:**

Attendance Works, Kaiser Permanente, & National Association of School Nurses. *Health Guidance for Going to School. [Handout]*  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/health-handouts-for-families/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, March 1). *Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick.*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html> (retrieved August 7, 2024).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 17). *Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools.* <https://www.cdc.gov/orr/school-preparedness/infection-prevention/index.html> (retrieved August 7, 2024)

Cleveland Clinic. (2023, September 11). *Too Sick for School? How to Decide if You Should Keep Your Kid Home from School.*  
<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/should-your-child-stay-home-sick-heres-how-to-decide> (retrieved August 7, 2024)