

# When is your student too sick to go to school?

By Katie Keith and Vicki Sulser

With contagious illnesses expected to increase as the weather turns cold, what can we do daily to strengthen our children's defense against germs? Let's look at ways to stay healthy.

- Make sleep non-negotiable. Growing children need more sleep than adults.
- Fuel young bodies well. The best defense comes from fruits and vegetables.
- Teach your kids to wash their hands thoroughly (for 20 seconds) and keep hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes in the car for cleaning hands on the trip home from school. Children can help keep others safe from germs by coughing or sneezing into their elbow.

When kids get sick despite parents' best efforts, we need to keep them hydrated and rested. If your child is contagious, it is important to protect classmates and family members. Please remember: If you are too sick to go to school, you are too sick for the after-school activities, too.

It is time to stay home from school when your student has vomiting or diarrhea. Any unusual goop coming from eyes or skin means your child should visit his healthcare provider. Other symptoms can be more challenging to assess.

## **Fever**

When you have a fever, you may feel chills and body aches. We encourage every household to have a handy dandy thermometer. If your body temperature is 100.4 °F or higher, you probably are contagious and you should stay home for at least 24 hours. When you get your first normal body temperature (the average is 98.6 °F), the 24-hour clock starts. If your student has been fever-free for 24 hours – without fever-reducing medicine – and is feeling well enough to go back to school, it is OK to do so.

## **Cold symptoms**

With colds, as long as there is no fever and the child feels well enough to participate in class, they can go to school. If they're piling up used tissues, coughing severely, wheezing or running a fever, a day or two to rest might be in order. A child should definitely stay home if she has a persistent cough with phlegm or is extra cranky or lethargic. If a child will not eat, it's best to keep him home until he feels better. Colds usually spread in the 1-3 days before children show symptoms, such as a runny nose or minor cough.

## **Sore throat**

If you suspect the sore throat is strep, it's time to stay home from school and call your healthcare provider. Strep throat tends to come on suddenly and is often accompanied by a fever, stomachache or headache. Strep doesn't usually cause cold-like symptoms, like a cough or runny nose.

Parents know their children best, so if you suspect your child won't be able to comfortably make it through their school day, a day off is probably the best idea.

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