

"To School or Not to School:" Is Your Child Too Sick to Come to School?

From the desk of Julie Simaldoni School Nurse.

Children are unique and respond to illness in their own unique way. Be familiar with what is normal for your child; temperature, behavior, appetite, etc. The solutions to health care problems and the treatments for illnesses should always be specific for your child's needs. When your children are sick they need your special and individualized attention.

The following guidelines for some common illnesses may help you to decide when to send your children to school and when to keep them home.

Colds – A runny nose, sore throat, fever, cough and red eyes are symptoms of a cold.

- A runny nose is often the way a child's body responds to pollen or dust or sometimes simply a reaction to a change in season.
- A bad cough or sore throat may indicate a severe cold or the flu, but can sometimes also signal pneumonia.
- If your child is not acting like he/she normally does, has a fever, difficulty breathing, or is not taking fluids, this may signal a serious problem.
- Children can also become dehydrated and this can lead to other very serious problems.
- Check with your doctor, clinic, or health care provider right away, if any of these symptoms exist.

***If your child does not have a fever or discomfort and can fully participate in school activities, or has been seen by a health care professional recommending return to school, then he/she should come to school.**

Fever - You should know your child's "normal temperature".

- Normal body temperature for most children is 98.6° F. orally {from the mouth} or 99.6° F. rectally {from the bottom} **Fever is defined as a temperature of 100.0 or above, orally.**
- If you think that your child has a fever, always use a thermometer. Never try to guess by feeling their forehead or using other non-measurable techniques.
- If your child truly has a fever, you may choose or be directed by a health care professional to use fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol.
 - When your child is taking these medications and their temperature returns to normal, they should not come back to school immediately.
 - **Your child's temperature should be normal without any fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours before returning to school.**
 - For example, if your child had a fever during the night, they should not go to school the next morning, even if their temperature is normal in the morning.
- Your child's temperature may be normal in the morning, but may rise to fever level by the afternoon.
- When your child has a fever, their immunities are lowered and so they may be more susceptible to other illness or infections.

Diarrhea and Vomiting - These symptoms can make children very uncomfortable.

- If your child has repeated episodes of diarrhea and/or vomiting, with fever, a rash, or general weakness, consult your physician or health care provider.
- Keep your child out of school until this type of illness passes or your doctor or health care provider recommends that they return to school.
- If your child vomits during the night, it is best not to send them to school the next day.
- Diarrhea has many causes and it may be difficult to know the specific reason. Without a health care professional's evaluation, treatment and recommendations for return to school, children who experience diarrhea may return to school only when their bowel movement (poop) has returned to "normal consistency" for them.

Ear infections/Earache – Ear infections are also serious health concerns.

- Unless properly treated they can lead to permanent hearing loss.
- Hearing is one of the most important senses that we have and is the most important sense for learning.
- Earaches should never be ignored.
- If your child complains of an earache or there is any drainage or discharge for the ears, consult your health care professional.
- Your child should be free of ear pain, fever, and drainage or discharge for at least 24 hours before they return to school.

Contagious Infections and Infestations – Health conditions such as pink eye (conjunctivitis), impetigo, ringworm, lice and scabies must be properly treated and your child should be symptom free before they return to school.

- Consult with your health care provider for treatment options and recommendations for when your child should return to school.