

Too Sick for Childcare or School



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

How can I tell when to keep my child home?

The main reasons to keep your child home are if he:

- Is too sick to be comfortable at the childcare center or school.
- Will need more care than the school or childcare center can provide.
- Might spread a contagious (catchy) disease to other children.

As a rule of thumb, keep your child at home or call your child's doctor if he seems very ill or has:

- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F) in the last 24 hours
- Acts sick which might include any of these:
 - Listless or irritable
 - Whining
 - Has decreased energy or is sleeping more than usual
- Pain not relieved by acetaminophen or ibuprofen

Stomach problems:

- Vomits more than once
- Frequent, loose stools

A bad cough or cold:

- A bad cough
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing

Rashes and sores:

- Body rash that is catchy (contagious) and has not been seen by a doctor
- Draining rash or sore that cannot be covered
- Is very itchy
- Mouth sores with drooling

If your child has any of these problems, ask his doctor if an office visit is needed. If your child is ill and has already been seen by his doctor, ask the doctor when he can return to childcare or school.

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

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What can I do to help stop the spread of these illnesses?

Most of these illnesses can be spread easily in the school, child care center and in your family.

- **Hand hygiene is the best thing you can do and teach your children to do to help prevent the spread of infections.** You may use:
 - Soap and water
 - Alcohol cleanser as long as you don't have dirt or grime on your hands
- Teach your child to cover his coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough into his sleeve, not his hand.
- Teach your child not to share food or drink, personal items, drinking glasses or eating utensils.

If you have doubts about sending your child to school or childcare, call your child's doctor before doing so. A phone call may be all that is needed, or your doctor may need to see your child in the office.

Make sure your child's school or childcare center knows how to reach you during the day. Also make sure that there is a backup plan and alternate phone number on file so they can reach you.

When should I keep my child home?

Use these guidelines to help you decide when to keep your child home:

Illness	Contagious (catchy)?	Symptoms	When to return to school or childcare
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 over 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 playmate's parents if your child gets chickenpox. • Children who have not yet had chickenpox should receive a shot (vaccine) to protect them from the disease.
Colds	Yes, unless caused by an allergy	<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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature over 100.3°F 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until there is no fever without using 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until there is no fever without using medicines for 24 hours and symptoms subside. This is usually for 5 – 7 days. <p>NOTE: Children with chronic health problems should have a flu shot each year.</p>

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Illness	Contagious (catchy)?	Symptoms	When to return to school or childcare
Impetigo	Yes – spread by direct contact or by droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red, oozing, blister-like rash on body or face 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child at home until his doctor says it is OK to return to school.
Middle ear infections	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear pain • Fever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may attend school if comfort level allows.
MRSA	Yes– Spread person to person by hand contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling • Drainage • Fever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antibiotics if advised by your child’s doctor. • May return to school once treatment is started. • For open sores, keep covered until no more drainage. • No close contact sports until all sites are healed.
Pinkeye	Yes– spread by a germ or virus. NOTE: may also be due to allergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watery eyes • Itchy eyes • Redness in whites of eyes • Puffy eyelids • Drainage from eyes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antibiotics if advised by your child’s doctor. • Return to school as your child’s doctor directs.
Ringworm – skin and scalp	Yes– spread by direct contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin – pink, raised patches, mild itching • Scalp – flaky or crusty patches, 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. • May return to school once treatment begins.
Scabies and lice	Yes – spread by direct contact. Scabies affects the skin; lice affect the scalp.	<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 after treatment begins. • For lice - Keep your child home until all live lice are gone. Check your child’s head for lice for 7 to 10 days. Retreat as needed. • Teach your child not to share hats, brushes, combs, clothing or linens.
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"> • Take your child to the doctor if he has these symptoms. • Keep your child home until he is free of fever and on antibiotics for 24 hours.
Vomiting or diarrhea	Depends on cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomits more than once • Loose, runny stools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until the illness passes and he is free of fever without using medicines for 24 hours. • If diarrhea or vomiting occur often or occur with a fever, rash or general weakness, call your child’s doctor.

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