IS YOUR CHILD TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL?

Early in the morning, it is often difficult to make a decision about whether or not your child is sick enough to stay home from school. With minor symptoms, you often cannot tell whether he or she is going to get better or worse during the course of the day.

The main reasons for keeping your child home are:
- He or she is too sick to be comfortable at school.
- He or she might spread a contagious disease to other children.

As a rule of thumb, a child should stay home if he or she has:
- Fever higher than 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Vomited more than once
- Diarrhea
- Frequent cough
- Persistent pain (ear, stomach, etc.)
- Widespread rash

Most of these problems need to be discussed with your child’s health care provider to determine if an office visit is needed.

If your child has frequent complaints of pain that cause school absence, you should consider the possibility that your child is intentionally avoiding school. Bring this to the attention of the child’s doctor before a great deal of school has been missed.

On the other hand, children who do not have a fever and only have a mild cough, runny nose or other cold symptoms can be sent to school without any harm to themselves or others. The following guidelines may help your decision process:

- **A runny nose** is the way many children respond to pollen, dust, or a cold virus. Minor cold or allergy symptoms should not be a reason to miss school. Many healthy children have as many as 6-12 colds per year, especially in the early school years.

- **Coughing**, especially if it is persistent during the day, can indicate a worsening of cold or allergy symptoms. It may be a sign of a secondary infection (ex: sinusitis, pneumonia), which may require medical treatment. It may also indicate mild asthma. If your child’s cough is worse than you might expect with a common cold, you need to consult your child’s doctor. You should do so immediately if the child is not acting normal, has a fever, or has difficulty breathing.

- **Diarrhea and vomiting** make children very uncomfortable. A single episode of vomiting, without any other symptoms, may not be reason enough for the child to miss school. Please be sure the school can reach you if symptoms occur again during the day. A single episode of watery diarrhea probably warrants not going to school. It could be very embarrassing and uncomfortable for your child to have another episode while in school. If diarrhea or vomiting are frequent or are accompanied by fever, rash or general weakness, consult your child’s doctor and keep the child out of school until the illness passes.

- **Middle ear infections** can cause great discomfort and often fever but are not contagious to others. Your child should see his or her doctor for diagnosis and treatment and should stay home if accompanied with fever or pain.

- **Fever** (generally considered to be higher that 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit) is an important symptom- especially when it occurs along with a sore throat, nausea, or rash. Your child could have a contagious illness, which could be passed to classmates and teachers. While you can treat the fever, and usually make the child feel better temporarily, the cause of the fever (and the risk of passing it to others) is still there.

    *Children with a fever should be kept home until there is no fever for 24 hours- without the use of fever reducing medication.*

    NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN OR PRODUCTS CONTAINING ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN UNDER 19!
• **Ringworm (Tinea Corporis)** can cause itchy, red, raised, scaly patches that may blister and ooze. Red patches are often redder around the outside with normal skin tone in the center. This may look like a ring. Your child can attend school as long as the area is being treated with anti-fungal medication and is clean, dry, and covered.

• **Strep throat and scarlet fever** are two highly contagious conditions caused by the same bacterial infection. They usually arrive with a sudden complaint of sore throat and fever and often a stomachache and headache. With scarlet fever, a rash usually appears within 12-48 hours. A child with these symptoms should see his or her doctor for diagnosis and treatment and should remain out of school until he or she is without fever and has been on antibiotics for **24 hours**.

• **Pinkeye or conjunctivitis** can be caused by a virus, bacteria, or allergy. The first two are very contagious. The eye will be reddened and a cloudy or yellow discharge is usually present. The eye may be sensitive to light. Consult with your child’s doctor to see if antibiotic eye drops are needed. Again, your child should stay home until symptoms subside and he or she has been on antibiotic eye drops at least **24 hours** or until the doctor recommends your child return to school.

• **Impetigo** is a staph or strep infection that creates a red, oozing blister-like area that can appear anywhere on the body or face. A honey-colored crust may appear on the area. It can be passed to others by direct contact. Consult your child’s doctor for treatment and suggestions to make your child more comfortable.

• **Chickenpox** is a highly contagious viral illness. It causes fever and an itchy rash, which spreads quickly all over the body, changing from red bumps to blister-like lesions, then scabs. Your child needs to stay home until all bumps are scabbed and no new bumps have appeared for two days. Your child is contagious at least two days before the rash starts, so you need to let the school and playmates know and consult your child’s doctor for treatment of symptoms. A vaccine is available for children who have not yet had chickenpox and is required for all children who were born on or after September 1, 1998.

• **Mites and lice** brought into a school can quickly produce an epidemic of itching and scratching. Mites are tiny insects that burrow into the skin and cause severe itching. Lice are tiny wingless insects, like ticks, that thrive on the warm scalps of children and cause itching. Both should be treated immediately with advice from your child’s doctor. Sullivan County School’s policy states that parent’s/guardian’s must show proof of treatment with appropriate lotion/shampoo and must be free of live bugs before returning to school the next day. Eggs/nits should be removed with a fine comb or fingernails. Sullivan County will allow one excused school day for treatment. Please refer to your Sullivan County Handbook for the complete lice policy. Head checks should continue at home for 1 to 14 days. Please caution your child against sharing combs, brushes, hats or other clothing.

• **Additional Information**
  • Your child should be appropriately dressed for the season and weather.
  • Keep in mind that hand washing is the single most important thing you can do and teach your child to do that will prevent the spread of disease.
  • All of the above illnesses can be spread easily, both in school and in the family.
  • Whenever there is a doubt about sending your child to school, consult with your child’s doctor before doing so. A phone consultation may be all that is necessary or your child’s doctor may need to see the child in the office.
  • Make sure that your child’s school can reach you during the day and that there is a back-up plan and phone number on file if the school cannot reach you.
  • If it is medically necessary for your child to receive medication at school, medication forms must be completed by the parent before medication can be administered.
  • Medication must be brought to school by the parent/guardian. Medications brought to school in any container other than the original prescription bottle or unopened medication bottle will not be administered by the school or school nurse.

This general healthcare information should NOT be used as a substitute or in place of contacting your child’s healthcare provider. If you need further assistance, call your child’s pediatrician, your school’s nurse or call 423-354-1043 to speak to the School Nursing Supervisor.