When to keep your child home from school

Knowing when to keep your child home from school due to illness is crucial for their well-being and to prevent the spread of infections within the school community.

Here is a checklist of common symptoms and conditions that should prompt you to keep your child home from school:

Symptoms requiring stay-at-home:

- Fever: Any temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. Keep your child home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- Vomiting or diarrhea: Keep your child home until they have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours. If symptoms persist or are severe, consult your pediatrician.
- Worsening or non-improving respiratory symptoms: This includes cough, shortness of breath, and tightness in the chest, especially if not explained by allergies or other non-communicable conditions.
- Severe cough: A persistent cough that makes it difficult for your child to learn or participate in activities, or a cough accompanied by difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or wheezing.
- Conjunctivitis (pinkeye): Eye drainage present. Highly contagious. Keep your child home until a doctor clears them to return to school.
- Undiagnosed rash: Especially if accompanied by fever or behavioral changes.
- Other highly contagious infections: Such as chickenpox (until all blisters have dried and crusted), strep throat (24 hours after antibiotics started), impetigo, ringworm, or scabies.
- Fatigue or general malaise: If your child is too tired or unwell to focus on and participate in school activities, they will benefit more from resting at home.

Symptoms that may or may not require stay-at-home:

- Mild cold symptoms (runny nose, mild cough, sore throat): Generally, a child with mild cold symptoms can go to school as long as they don't have a fever and their symptoms are improving and not disrupting class participation.
- Stomachache or headache: While these can be signs of illness, they may also be caused by other factors like anxiety or dehydration. Assess your child's overall well-being and consider keeping them home if the pain is severe or accompanied by other concerning symptoms.
- Head Lice: Students may return after their hair has been treated, and the school nurse has assessed for removal of all nits.

When in doubt:

- Consult your child's pediatrician: They can provide specific advice tailored to your child's condition and help determine if a doctor's visit is necessary.
- Err on the side of caution: If you're concerned about your child's ability to participate in school or the potential spread of infection, keeping them home to rest is generally the best approach.

Remember:

- Good hygiene practices, like frequent handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes, can help prevent the spread of illness.
- Ensure your child is up to date on recommended vaccinations to help protect them and others from infectious diseases.

By using this checklist and consulting with medical and school professionals as needed, you can make informed decisions about when to keep your child home from school, promoting both their well-being and the health of the school community.