

How sick is too sick?

Parents may wonder whether they should send their child to school if the child has symptoms of illness or is being treated for an infection or communicable disease. Also, the child may have sustained an injury which would preclude his being in school for his own safety and well-being. At times, children will become ill or injured at school and parents will be contacted to take the child to a medical facility or home.

The following guidelines can help parents, caregivers, and school staff as they determine “how sick is too sick”

- Child has a condition that requires immediate medical diagnosis or intervention, e.g., needs emergency dental care, sutures, bone-setting, or medical care.
- Child needs ongoing supervision, above and beyond that normally provided in daycare or school, which cannot be managed in the routine setting.
- Child is not able to function because of illness, e.g., fever, toothache, vomiting, loose stools, migraine headache.
- Child has untreated pediculosis or scabies.
- Child has an open, draining, infected skin lesion which cannot be covered with a protective barrier.
- Child has a persistent, productive cough.
- Child has an un-diagnosed rash.

Additionally, a child should not be sent to school if he or she poses a significant health risk to others in the normal course of the day in day care or school activities, such as in the following situations:

- The child is in the infectious stage of a serious airborne transmitted communicable disease including, but not limited to, chicken pox, measles, mumps, pertussis, tuberculosis, or rubella
- The child unable to hygienically manage bowel and/or bladder functions expected of his age and/or is in the infectious stage of an oral-fecal transmitted communicable disease (Hepatitis A, giardiasis, salmonella, shigella, rotovirus, and parasites)

Children may not be excluded from school when the risk of transmission of a communicable disease is non-existent in that setting or when transmission can be controlled through education of staff and child and the provision of readily available supplies to carry out hygiene measures.

If your child shows signs of illness at the beginning of the school day, check her/his temperature. Keep your child home if his/her temperature is 100 degrees F° or greater before use of fever reducing medication. The child should not return to school until his/her temperature has been below 100 degrees F for 24 hours.

If your child has diarrhea or vomiting, he/she cannot return to school until 24 hours after it has stopped.

Sending a sick child to school is hard on him and can expose others to contagious illnesses. When a child has a communicable disease, the school office must be informed so that the parents of classmates can be notified. After beginning an antibiotic, your child must remain at home for a full 24 hours before he is considered non- contagious.

Parents, care providers, and school staff are encouraged to contact a health care professional for specific information and recommendation about the ill or injured child's needs for exclusion from the setting and possible medical assessment and intervention.