

Pediatrician discusses when to keep kids home from school

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For many reasons, a child being home from school while sick can be stressful. Parents worry about the severity of their child's illness and about the child missing school, all while trying to shuffle work schedules to be home.

"Being a parent is a juggling act, but throw in a child being home sick from school and the delicate balance topples. Many [parents](#) ask: When is it important to keep my child home from school and when should I send them?" said Hannah Chow-Johnson, MD, pediatrician at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Schools are a perfect place for infectious diseases to thrive, so it's important for parents to be vigilant when it comes to their child's health.

"There are times when it's best for the child and his or her classmates to just remain at home," said Chow.

Chow gives some guidelines to help parents make that decision.

Pinkeye

Conjunctivitis, better known as pinkeye, is extremely contagious and is usually caused by a virus. One of the first signs of pinkeye is discomfort. Other symptoms include a sticky discharge that can cause the eyelids to stick together and the area around the eye can look red and swollen.

"Your child is contagious with bacterial or viral conjunctivitis until the redness and discharge are gone. If the cause is viral eye drops won't help. The only cure is time. Don't send your child to school until the redness is gone," said Chow.

Stomach problems

Gastroenteritis or the stomach flu can cause vomiting and diarrhea. It is primarily caused by a virus and a child needs rest and take gradual fluids to recover.

"Children should not go back to school until both the vomiting and diarrhea are gone for 24 hours," said Chow.

Coughing

According to Chow, if a child has a steady cough, a hacking cough or coughing fits he or she should stay home. It's also important for children and adults to be vaccinated against pertussis or [whooping cough](#).

"A child can go to school with a minor cough, but the child should practice good coughing hygiene, such as coughing into a tissue or their elbow and washing hands frequently," Chow said.

Fevers

Most schools have a policy that a child can't attend if they have a fever higher than 100 degrees and the child needs to be fever-free for 24 hours before returning to school.

"This is a good policy. If a child has fever that means he or she needs rest. The fever itself is not contagious but it causes the body to slow down to rest and recuperate," Chow said.

Sore throat

Many parents think [sore throat](#) means strep throat, but in 70 percent of the cases the pain is caused by a virus. Symptoms of strep also include headache, stomachache and fevers. Sometimes there is a sunburn-like rash on the throat.

"Children with strep are contagious and should not be in school until they have been on an antibiotic for 24 hours. If it is a viral infection, go by comfort level as far as returning to school," said Chow.

Lice

Unfortunately those stubborn bugs mean no school for kids. They are tenacious and can quickly spread through a classroom.

"Most schools have a no-nits policy. Before returning to school a child must have completed a lice treatment but that isn't enough. Parents must use a fine tooth comb to remove all nits and prevent lice recurrence before a [child](#) can return to [school](#)," Chow said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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