

Back to School or Daycare after an Illness

Sometimes, deciding when to send a recovering child back to school or daycare is easy. Some illnesses have a clear-cut contagious period with a definite endpoint, and returning to group situations will be straightforward. Most illnesses, however, are not as clear-cut, and judgments must be made. Children may be infectious before their symptoms show up and may shed virus germs for days or weeks after they feel better. There are two main points to consider:

- When will your child's contagious level permit him or her to return to a group setting
- When will your child be well enough to handle a day at school, and will the staff there be able to handle symptoms, provide relief, and recognize trouble

Here are a few guidelines: (school and daycare generally have the same guidelines)

- **Fever**
 - Children should not return to school until the temperature has been 100.4 or below for 12-24 hours
- **Energy or sense of well-being**
 - Children should remain at home until they feel well enough to handle a day of school. This is much more difficult to judge, but is still an important criteria.
- **Vomiting**
 - Children should stay home until they haven't vomited for a day
- **Diarrhea**
 - Children should stay home until the number of stools is manageable in school, and there is no worry about incontinence. Children who are not toilet trained should have stools that are easily contained in the diaper, with no leakage.
- **Rashes**
 - The duration of exclusion from school varies greatly with the type of rash.
- **Conjunctivitis**
 - Most children may return to school the next day.
- **Strep throat**
 - Children may return to school after 24-48 hours on the antibiotic without fever
- **Ear Infection or sinus infection**
 - Ear infections and sinus infections are not contagious. Return to school hinges on fever and pain level
- **Runny nose and cough**
 - These symptoms may persist for a two weeks or more after a cold, so excluding the child from school until they resolve is not practical

A word about medications

If antibiotics are prescribed for your child's infection, return to school is usually permitted in 24-48 hours. There are some exceptions to this rule, however, such as pertussis (whooping cough).

Cough and cold medicines offer NO advantage in terms of speed of recovery and do not affect the duration of the illness. We never recommend them for young children and generally avoid them before adolescence. (See our brochure on this topic for further information)

A word about Prevention

There are a few important things you can do to keep the number of infections to a minimum

- Be sure your child is fully immunized, including annual flu vaccine
- Teach your child to wash hands often, including before meals; provide hand sanitizer