

When to Keep Your Child Home?

At some point in school years, all parents face the tough choice of whether or not to send a sick child to school. In fact, school seems to be the place where diseases are caught, captured and sent home for all of us to experience.

Younger school-age children seem particularly susceptible to illness at school, especially if they haven't spent much time in pre-school or child care centres and been exposed to most childhood illnesses.

When a working parent is faced with a child that claims they are sick, it makes you wonder whether the child is really angling for time at home, or worried about something at school? Or is he honestly coming down with an infection?

Here's a quick guide to when you should keep your sick child at home and when you can take a chance that'll he'll feel better once he gets to school.

Keep a Sick Child at Home if You See the Following:

- **Fever.** This is one symptom that automatically rules out school, no questions. Your sick child should be fever-free without medication for at least 24 hours before you send him back to school. Most Australian schools won't administer over-the-counter fever-reduction medication, so it's definitely worth keeping your child home, making sure they drink plenty of fluids and can recover from whatever they are battling.
- **Diarrhoea.** This could be a sign of a viral infection, so it's best to keep your child at home. It's also important to keep rehydrating him with an oral rehydrating solution when he has diarrhoea, and the best way to do that is by keeping him at home.
- **Vomiting.** Aside from the fact that your child won't be comfortable, he could vomit again. Keep him home until he has gone 24 hours without throwing up – that way you won't feel guilty if you send him to school and they call you up to come and collect your vomiting child.
- **Cough.** This depends on how severe the cough is. Coughs can spread infection to other students. A serious cough can also keep a child from getting a good night's rest, which means he'll be too tired for school in the morning. As a general rule, if your child has a serious wet cough, particularly if it's accompanied by breathing troubles, seek medical advice. But if it's just a mild cough and he has no other symptoms, he can probably go to school.
- **Rashes.** Skin rashes could be a sign of a contagious infection, such as impetigo. You should have a rash evaluated by a doctor before sending your child to school.
- **Conjunctivitis.** This infection can quickly and easily spread from one child to another, as many parents of primary-school age children already know all too well. Keep your child home until the doctor says he is no longer contagious.
- **Stomach ache.** This one can be tough to call. If he doesn't have diarrhoea and isn't constipated, tummy trouble could be caused by any number of things from anxiety to food poisoning. If the stomach pains are minor enough to allow your child to continue walking and behaving in his usual boisterous fashion - and there are no other symptoms – this might be one of those times worth risking sending him to school. Later, you can talk to him about any emotional issues that may be on his mind.
- **Ear infection.** As with coughs, you should evaluate all his symptoms before making the call. If he has mild ear pain, he'll likely be fine; but if he's clearly uncomfortable, he will have trouble concentrating in class anyway and should be kept at home. And if there are any other accompanying symptoms such as a fever, it's a definite sick day.
- **Runny nose.** Let's be realistic: If you kept your child home every time he had the sniffles, he'd miss a lot of school. Use your judgment. If he has a runny nose but seems otherwise fine, then it's probably okay for him to go to school (with a box of tissues in his bag).

Trust your instincts. If your child seems lethargic and just not himself (if he's not interested in playing, that is often a big clue), keep him home and monitor him for any signs of illness.