

Should your child stay home from school?

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Q: When is it appropriate for parents to let their child stay home from school?

A: When children are ill, they are more tired, cranky and tend not to eat or drink. This sets them up to get further dehydrated and ill. To keep an illness from progressing, a day at home may be the first step. At home, caregivers can encourage a child to eat nourishing food like chicken soup, drink hydrating fluids such as water, and rest. Keeping your child home from school is important for both your child's health, as well as the health of their classmates and teachers. Children will exchange germs and get ill more frequently than adults.

Q: What signs or symptoms should a child have in order to be absent?

A: Some general rules of thumb to keep a child home from school include a fever over 101 degrees Fahrenheit, a severe cough, nausea, vomiting and wheezing. These same symptoms also merit calling your pediatrician and arranging for a trip to their office. Other important signs of illness are rash and general malaise.

Q: Which cold remedy works the best?

A: Most physicians and the FDA no longer recommend cough and cold medicines for children especially younger than age 2. For children older than 2, be wary of overdosing a child by using more than one remedy with the same ingredient. Children's Tylenol, Advil or Motrin can help with headache and low-grade fever. Always follow the directions on the label and from your physician. Cold-EEZE zinc lozenges or oral spray are an effective way to decrease the duration of a cold. Studies from Dartmouth and the Cleveland Clinic have shown a decrease by 42 percent of a cold's duration. Zinc gluconate works best when started on the first day of symptoms so always keep some handy. Clean humidifiers also go a long way in keeping your child comfortable with their nasal symptoms. Keep your child well-hydrated.

Q:Is there a way parents can prevent their children from getting sick?

A:Teaching your child good hygiene is the best prevention for staying healthy. Washing hands before eating or touching the eyes, nose and mouth is essential. A well-balanced diet, good hydration and rest are also important.

Many of the viruses that cause colds are airborne. Teach your children to sneeze into the crook of their arms and to cover their mouths when coughing. Then encourage them to wash their hands after coughing, blowing their noses and before eating. Also coughing onto toys can contaminate them and make others sick. Make sure your teacher is aware of your child's illness so hygiene precautions can be implemented at school.

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