



Too Sick for Childcare or School

Patient and Family Education

Is your child too sick for childcare or school?

It is often hard to decide if your child is too sick to go to school or the childcare center early in the morning. It is sometimes hard to tell if minor symptoms will get better or worse during the day.

How can I tell if I should send my child, treat him at home or take him to the doctor?

The main reasons to keep your child home are if he:

- Is too sick to be comfortable at the childcare center or school.
- Will need more care than the school or childcare center can provide.
- Might spread a contagious (catchy) disease to other children.

As a rule of thumb, keep your child at home or call your child's doctor if he seems very ill or has:

- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F).
- Acts sick.
- Vomits more than once.
- Frequent, watery stools.
- Mouth sores with drooling.
- Draining rash or sore that cannot be covered.
- A severe cough.
- Fast or troubled breathing.
- Pain not relieved by acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- A body rash.

If your child has any of these problems, ask his doctor if an office visit is needed. If your child is ill and has already been seen by his doctor, ask the doctor when he can return to childcare or school.

What can I do to help stop the spread of these illnesses?

Most of these illnesses can be spread easily in the school, child care center and in your family.

- **Hand hygiene is the most important thing you can do and teach your children to do to help prevent the spread of infections.** You may use:
 - Soap and water
 - Alcohol cleanser as long as you don't have dirt or grime on your hands
- Teach your child to cover his coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough into his sleeve, not his hand.
- Teach your child not to share food or drink, personal items, drinking glasses or eating utensils.

If you have doubts about sending your child to school or childcare, call your child's doctor before doing so. A phone call may be all that is needed, or your doctor may need to see your child in the office.

Make sure your child's school or childcare center knows how to reach you during the day. Also make sure that there is a backup plan and alternate phone number on file so they can reach you.

You may also call the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta 24-hour nurse advice line at 404-250-KIDS for advice when your child's doctor's office is not open.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

Too Sick for Childcare or School, continued

When should I keep my child home?

Use these guidelines to help you decide when to keep your child home:

Illness	Contagious (catchy)?	Symptoms	When to return to school or childcare
Cold symptoms	Yes, unless caused by an allergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny nose • Scratchy throat • Cough <p>NOTE: These symptoms may also be caused by allergies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may go to childcare with minor cold symptoms. • If symptoms are worse than you might expect with a common cold, call your child's doctor. • Call right away if your child is not acting normally, has a fever or has any trouble breathing.
Vomiting and diarrhea	Depends on cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomits more than once • Loose, runny stools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until the illness passes. • If diarrhea or vomiting occur often or occur with a fever, rash or general weakness, call your child's doctor.
Fever	Depends on cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperature over 100.3°F 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until there is no fever for 24 hours.
Middle ear infections	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ear pain • Fever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may attend school if comfort level allows.
Flu	Yes - spread by contact with droplets from eyes, mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Chills • Cold symptoms • Body aches • Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home until symptoms subside, usually about 5 – 7 days. <p>NOTE: Children with chronic health problems should receive a flu shot each year.</p>
Strep throat or scarlet fever	Yes – spread by contact with droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sore throat • Fever • Headache • Stomachache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take your child to the doctor if he has these symptoms. • Keep your child home until he is free of fever and on antibiotics for 24 hours.
Impetigo	Yes – spread by direct contact or by droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red, oozing, blister-like rash on body or face 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child at home until his doctor says it is OK to return to school
Chickenpox	Yes – spread by direct contact with fluid inside blisters or with droplets from mouth or nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Red, itchy rash over body – changes from bumps to blisters to scabs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child's doctor about treatment for your child. • Keep your child home until all the bumps have scabs and no new bumps appear for 2 days. • Tell the school and playmate's parents if your child gets chickenpox. • Children who have not yet had chickenpox should receive a shot (vaccine) to protect them from the disease.

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Scabies and lice (tiny insects)	Yes – spread by direct contact. Scabies affects the skin; lice affect the scalp.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Itching• Scratching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat your child's skin or scalp right away as directed by his doctor.• For scabies - Keep your child home until after treatment.• For lice - Keep your child home until all live lice are gone. Check your child's head for lice for 7 to 10 days. Retreat as needed.• Teach your child not to share hats, brushes, combs, clothing or linens.
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