

When Should a Child be Kept Home or Sent Home from School for Illness?



Washtenaw County
Health Department

Parents often ask when a child should be kept at home or sent home from school or childcare for illness. Here are EIGHT reasons a child should stay home or be picked up from childcare or school as soon as possible.

- 1. Severely ill appearance:** This could include a child that is not himself or herself, persistent crying, or difficulty breathing.
- 2. Fever:** A child with a temperature of 100° F or greater. The child should not return until 24 hours of no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- 3. Diarrhea:** A child has two loose bowel movements, even if there are no other signs of illness. The child should have no loose stools for 24 hours prior to returning to school. **Exception:** A healthcare provider has determined it is not infectious. Diarrhea may occasionally be caused by antibiotics, new foods a child has eaten, or teething. Call the parent to find out if there is a non-medical reason for the loose bowel movements.
- 4. Vomiting:** A child that has vomited two or more times. The child should have no vomiting for 24 hours prior to returning to school. **Exception:** A healthcare provider has determined it is not infectious.
- 5. Rash:** Any rash illness and fever should be checked by a health care provider. Exclude until the rash subsides or until a healthcare provider has determined it is not infectious. There are different rules for returning to childcare or school depending on the cause of the rash. A child with scarlet fever should be treated with antibiotics for 12 hours (at least 2 doses) before returning to childcare or school. If a health care provider diagnoses a child as having Fifth disease, the child does not need to stay home if s/he feels well. **Exception:** Allergic rash and mild diaper rash that are already known to the parent are not reasons to send a child home or keep a child home.
- 6. Injury:** Whenever an injury is serious enough to need a health care provider's attention, a parent should be contacted to take the child home.
- 7. Skin sores:** A child with weeping sores on an exposed area that cannot be covered with waterproof dressing.
- 8. Certain communicable diseases:** Children and staff diagnosed with certain communicable diseases may have to be excluded for a certain period of time.

Caregivers should:

- Isolate children if they have any of the above symptoms.
- Wash hands well to prevent the spread of disease to caregivers and other children.
- Use a paper towel to turn off faucets and open bathroom doors and then dispose of the paper towel in the wastebasket.
- Encourage parents to keep children home if they are ill.

While not an emergency situation (no need to have the child picked up immediately), children with the following diseases should remain at home until successfully treated: impetigo, lice, ringworm, and scabies.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.