

WHEN TO KEEP SICK CHILDREN HOME FROM SCHOOL

(Complied information from AAP, St. Louis Health Department and CDC – 2021)










Deciding when to keep a sick child home from school is not always easy. It's important for children to attend school, and for some parents staying home means missing work. We must all work as a team to prevent the spread of illness in our school. Determining whether your child has a cold, influenza or COVID may be difficult this year; however, our hope is that as parents, you would err on the side of caution when symptoms arise. Please keep the school office up to date with current phone numbers so you or an alternate contact can be reached if your child becomes ill or injured at school.

The following information may help you decide when to keep your child home. "Child" refers to all school-aged children including adolescents. This information does not take the place of consulting a medical provider. See below for "When to contact a medical provider".

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COVID, FLU & COMMON COLD

	COVID	INFLUENZA (FLU)	COMMON COLD
Symptoms Present	<p>COVID-19 is the illness caused by SARS-CoV-2 which is a coronavirus. This family of viruses also causes the common cold however this virus is highly contagious, is spread through the air and causes a wide variety of symptoms. Since this is a relatively new virus, the recommendations and even symptoms seen with COVID-19 have changed significantly since it first debuted in the US. As of July 2021, it is known that symptoms may develop between 2 and 10 days after initial exposure. Exposure is defined as contact with someone who has the virus within 6 feet and for 15 minutes or longer although, extended time in a classroom at greater than 6 feet is defined as exposure per the St. Louis Health Dept. The CDC advises social distance, mask wearing for those over 2 years old and frequent hand washing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Older persons, immunocompromised and those with severe underlying conditions are at higher risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19. Symptoms can range in healthy children and adults from mild to severe.</p> <p>WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:</p> <p>A child should remain at home if they have any of the symptoms of COVID-19 including fever or chills, new or worsening cough, new loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, fatigue muscle/body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. If your child is vaccinated and has COVID-19 symptoms, please keep your child home and contact your child's medical provider for further guidance.</p> <p>Please contact health@ccls-stlouis.org for questions.</p>	<p>The flu is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by an influenza virus and can cause mild to severe illness. A person with influenza can be contagious up to one week AFTER symptoms appear. Children are one of the biggest sources of spreading the flu. To help decrease spread of seasonal flu:</p> <p>WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:</p> <p>A child with flu-like illness (fever and cough) must stay home for minimum of 2 calendar days after fever presents. If symptoms persist past 48 hours, child should remain at home for 2 days after last use of fever-reducing medication. A fever is defined as a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. If symptoms occur while at school, student must be picked up as soon as possible. Your child's medical provider will be able to help you determine next steps including testing vs treatment at home.</p> <p>Contact medical provider with severe symptoms immediately if child has a chronic medical condition that could make them vulnerable to influenza complications.</p>	<p>The common cold is a contagious upper respiratory virus caused by a coronavirus. This is not the same as "COVID" or the virus causing COVID. It is the most frequent childhood illness and symptoms usually last 7-14 days but typically resolve on their own without medical treatment such as antibiotics. This, however, may not be true for those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma therefore seeking attention of a medical provider may be necessary for severe symptoms or a fever lasting greater than 2-3 days.</p> <p>WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL:</p> <p>A child with significant "cold" symptoms such as a deep or uncontrollable cough, significant lack of energy or difficulty breathing or catching his/her breath belongs at home. If fever is present, child should remain at home for 2 days after last use of fever-reducing medicine/when fever resolves. Fever is defined as a temperature over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.</p>

Symptoms Present	COVID	INFLUENZA	COMMON COLD
Onset of symptoms	2-14 days after exposure but typically within 2-5 days.	Rapid onset, 24-48 hrs	Gradual onset, 48-72 hrs or longer
Fever	✓ Very Common; Typical in symptomatic patients and may be the first symptom. Can be very high and last several days.	✓ Very Common; Typically, a high-grade fever that lasts several days (3-4 days)	✓ Variable based on age; Uncommon in older children, can be as high as 102 in infants and toddlers
Shortness of Breath	✓ Common	✗ Rare (unless child has chronic medical condition such as asthma)	✗ Rare (unless child has chronic medical condition such as asthma)
Difficulty Breathing	✓ Uncommon but requires immediate medical attention	✗ Rare	✗ Rare
Cough	✓ Very Common; may be dry or wet	✓ Common; Can be severe	✓ Common, Mild, hacking cough
Headache	✓ Common; May be first symptom	✓ Common; Sudden onset typical	✗ Uncommon
Muscle or Body Aches	✓ Common but more prevalent in adults	✓ Common; Can be severe in children	✓ Common; Typically limited duration
Tiredness or Fatigue	✓ Fatigue may be severe. If child unable to get out of bed or stay awake, contact a medical professional.	✓ Fatigue may be severe	✓ Typically mild in severity
Abdominal Pain	✓ Uncommon but may occur	✓ Common	✗
Vomiting	✓ Uncommon but may occur	✓ Common	✗
Diarrhea	✓ Uncommon but may occur	✓ Common	✗

Nausea	 Uncommon but may occur	 Common	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Runny Nose	 Can occur in younger children		
Congestion	 Common		
Sneezing	 Can occur, not as common	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Sore Throat		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Rash	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chest pressure or pain	 Atypical and requires immediate medical attention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May have mild chest pressure with severe cough. If persistent or severe, contact your medical professional.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May have mild chest pressure with severe cough. If persistent or severe, contact your medical professional.
Confusion	 Atypical and requires immediate medical attention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Dehydration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May occur with significant malaise/fatigue and cough; if present, call your child's medical provider	 If unable to keep fluids down for greater than 24 hrs or no urination for greater than 8 hrs, contact your medical professional.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> May occur with significant cough
Loss of Sense of Taste		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Loss of Sense of Smell		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Common Childhood Symptoms and Illnesses:

****Children sent home from school may not return until the child is home for more than 24 hours.****

FREQUENT SYMPTOMS: Sometimes children pretend or exaggerate illness in order to stay home. However, frequent complaints of tummy aches, headaches and other symptoms may be a physical sign that a child is feeling emotionally stressed, a common experience even in children. Consult a medical provider to evaluate symptoms. Stress-based complaints cause some children to unnecessarily miss a great deal of school. It is important to check often with your children about how things are going. Share concerns with school staff so they can provide support for you and your child to help make attending school a positive experience.

COUGH: A mild hacking cough often starts after the first few days of a common cold but is also present with COVID and flu. Due to cough being present with COVID, if known exposure, please keep your child home. If no further symptoms arise, it may be advisable to return to school.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child with deep or uncontrollable coughing belongs at home even without a fever. **A child with cough and fever must stay home from school for at least 48 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicine for 2 calendar days.**

DIARRHEA/VOMITING:

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Children who have vomited or had diarrhea should be kept at home and should return to school only after being symptom-free for 1 calendar day, minimum of 24 hrs.

EARACHE: Consult a medical provider for earaches. Ear infections may require medical treatment.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child should stay at home until pain free and fever free. If prescribed antibiotics, a child may return once on antibiotics for 24 hours and fever free for 24 hours.

FEVER: Fevers are a common symptom of viral and bacterial infection. Children are likely to be contagious to others when they have a fever. If fever is considered, please check your child's temperature at home. Please do not give your child fever reducing medicine and then send them to school. The medicine will wear off, the fever will probably return and you'd need to pick them up anyway. This is especially important this year with COVID as we want to reduce the spread in our community.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Any child with a fever of 100°F or higher should not attend school and should not return until they have been fever free for 48 hours. **A child with flu-like illness (fever and a cough) must stay home from school for at least 48 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Email health@ccls-stlouis.org for more guidance on when your child can return to school.**

SEASONAL ALLERGIES: Allergies are common during changes of season and can be difficult to distinguish from flu, cold or COVID depending on your child's response. If your child only has watery eyes with no purulent or colored drainage AND does not have a fever, he/she may be able to come to school. Unfortunately, COVID symptoms and seasonal allergies present similarly as a person with seasonal allergies typically has a sore throat, cough, fatigue and runny nose. If your child has a fever or significant cough, it would be best to monitor symptoms at home to ensure she/he only has allergies. Fevers are not typical with seasonal allergies. Consult your medical provider for further recommendations to determine if your child has allergies or another illness.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: If your child has a fever of 100°F or higher should not attend school and should not return until they have been fever free for 48 hours. **A child with flu-like illness (fever and a cough) must stay home from school for at least 48 hours after they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicine. Email health@ccls-stlouis.org for more guidance.**

HEADACHES: A child whose only complaint is a mild headache usually does not need to stay home from school. Complaints of frequent or more severe headaches should be evaluated by a medical provider, including vision exam if needed.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child with a significant headache belongs at home until feeling better.

IMPETIGO: A contagious bacterial skin infection that usually begins with small fluid filled blisters that cause a honey-colored crust on skin after bursting. It is important to have these symptoms evaluated by a medical provider because untreated infection can lead to serious complications. 24 hours after starting prescribed antibiotics, impetigo is no longer contagious.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Students may attend school if drainage can be effectively kept covered and is not extensive.

PINK EYE (Conjunctivitis): A common infectious disease of one or both eyes caused by several types of bacteria and viruses. The eye typically appears very red and feels irritated. There may be drainage of mucous and pus or clear liquid. Prescription medication may be needed to treat bacterial infection. Virus-caused pink eye will not need antibiotic treatment.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child with the above symptoms should be kept at home until evaluated by a medical provider and return to school with or without treatment depending on the diagnosis. Please send your child with a note from his/her medical provider clearing her/him to return to school.

RASHES: A rash may be one of the first signs of a contagious childhood illness such as chickenpox. Rashes may cover the entire body or be in only one area and are most contagious in the early stages.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Do not send a child with a rash to school until a medical provider has said it is safe to do so – especially with additional symptoms like itching, fever or appearing ill. If fever present, remain home for 48 hours.

SORE THROAT: A child with a mild sore throat, no fever and otherwise feeling well may be fine to attend school however, use your judgement. If child has any other symptoms, please keep student home due to an abundance of caution this year.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Keep a child at home and contact a medical provider for a severe sore throat and if white spots are seen in the back of the throat, with or without a fever.

STREP THROAT: A significantly sore throat could be strep throat, a contagious illness. Other symptoms may include fever, white spots in the back of the throat, headache and upset stomach. Untreated strep throat can lead to serious complications.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Keep your child home from school with the above symptoms and contact a medical provider. A child diagnosed with strep throat is no longer infectious and can return to school 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has been started. Please send your child back to school with doctor's note.

STOMACH PAIN: Stomach pain, depending on the severity and location, can be a sign of something serious or it may be a simple tummy ache.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: Consult a medical provider and do not send a child to school with a stomach ache that is persistent or severe enough to limit activity. If vomiting or diarrhea occurs, keep the child home until symptom free for 24 hours.

TOOTHACHE: For tooth pain, contact a dentist to have a child evaluated as soon as possible.

WHEN TO KEEP A CHILD HOME FROM SCHOOL: A child with a significant toothache should not attend school until feeling better.

WHEN TO CONTACT A MEDICAL PROVIDER:

Be sure to contact a medical provider any time there is concern about a child's health.

In children, emergency warning signs for COVID or flu-like illness that need urgent medical attention include:

- **Fast breathing or trouble breathing**
- **Bluish or gray skin color**
- **Bluish lips**
- **Confusion**
- **Significant chest pain**
- **Not drinking enough fluids or not urinating at a minimum of every 6-8 hours.**
- **Not producing wet diapers**
- **Severe or persistent vomiting**
- **Not waking up or interacting OR unable to stay awake**
- **Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held OR if child is completely inconsolable**
- **Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough**

Other reasons to contact a medical provider include but are not exclusive to:

- **If a child looks or acts really sick, with or without a fever**
- **Decreased appetite**
- **Cold symptoms for longer than 10-14 days or getting sicker or a there is a fever after the first few days**
- **Chronic coughing; uncontrollable coughing; wheezing**
- **Rashes; eye drainage; earache; toothache**
- **Exposure to COVID positive contact with new fever, cough or loss of smell or taste**
- **New change in desire to participate in normal activities, change in mood or behavior**

HEALTHY HABITS to STAY WELL and PREVENT SPREADING GERMS

- **WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN** with soap and water especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
 - Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** to help prevent the spread of viruses.
- **Don't share** food, utensils, beverages or anything that might be contaminated with germs.
- **Try to avoid close contact with sick people.**
- **Stay home when sick**, especially with flu-like symptoms of fever and cough. Stay home for at least 48 hours after being fever free without the use of fever reducing medicine.
- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.** Throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- **Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or elbow** instead of your hands if you do not have a tissue.
- **Wear a mask if you are asked or if you are going to be in a large group where you cannot socially distance.**
 - See CDC and St. Louis County guidelines for current guidelines.
- **Clean surfaces that may be contaminated with germs** using household disinfectant cleaners.
- **Discuss necessary vaccinations with your healthcare provider.**
- **Get a flu shot every year to help prevent seasonal flu.**