

How to Decide Whether Your Child Should Stay Home from School

Every Baltimore County Public School has a full time school nurse who can evaluate children who develop signs of illness during the school day. However, in the best interest of the child and to minimize the spread of germs, it is important for parents to know when it is safe to send a child to school and when it's best to keep a child home.

A child may safely be sent to school if he/she:

- Has vague or generalized complaints of illness without any specific symptoms like fever, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Has a chronic health problem and you and his/her doctor have a plan for meeting health needs at school.
- Has mild cough or cold symptoms without fever or difficulty breathing.
- Has been fever-free for 24 hours WITHOUT medication. It's very important to wait at least 6 hours after the last dose of Tylenol or ibuprofen before checking the temperature. It is also important to wait most of a day to be sure the fever is gone; many times a child's temperature goes down in the morning but rises again in the afternoon.
- Has a stomachache but does not have a fever, vomiting or diarrhea. It is often challenging in the rush of the morning to know if a stomachache is going to develop into something more serious. In general, it is okay to send your child to school with a stomachache unless the child is unable to eat and this is something out-of-the-ordinary for your child. (Some children, particularly adolescents, are often reluctant to eat in the morning.)

Your child should be kept home from school if he/she:

- Has a fever of more than 100 degrees. It is important to have a thermometer to measure a fever – just touching a child's head only tells you how warm the head is. Most grocery and drug stores sell thermometers for \$5 or less.
- Has vomited two or more times. A single episode of vomiting can be caused by a variety of non-illness related issues. However, vomiting more than two times is a sign of a contagious condition.
- Has diarrhea. It can be difficult to know when diarrhea is more than a loose bowel movement. Parents should watch for two or more episodes of watery stools, particularly if the child also has nausea, a fever, or other signs of illness. A child with blood or mucus in the stool should be taken to the doctor for further evaluation.
- Has severe pain. Many times a doctor will clear a child to return to school after an ear infection, dental procedure, or other intervention. However, most children who need prescription-strength pain medication to control pain will not be able to learn and should stay home until the condition is controlled with over-the-counter pain medications like Tylenol and Advil.