

# WHEN TO RETURN TO SCHOOL AFTER AN ILLNESS

## *Returning to School After Illness*

It can be challenging to determine when your child is well enough to return to school. The following guidelines were adapted from TDHS Communicable Disease Chart for Schools and Childcare Centers for The Brook Hill School by our Health Care Team. Additionally, some guidelines were adapted from Diana H. Dameron, BSN, MPH, Supervisor, School Health Services, Pinellas County Schools, Florida, and Jack Hutto, M.D., chief, Infectious Disease Department, All Children's Hospital St Petersburg, Florida.

### Cat scratch disease

This illness is usually spread by bacteria from the cat's saliva into a child's open skin and not by person to person contact. Therefore, the child may attend school.

### Colds

As long as there is no fever or discomfort, a child with a cold may go to school as long as they are not too uncomfortable to function in school. Instruct the child on the proper use of tissues for coughing, sneezing, and nose blowing. They should also be taught good hand washing techniques, since research has shown that more colds are spread via contaminated hands than by infected droplets in the air. Alcohol wipes can be used to reduce spread from hands or contaminated objects (toys, etc.)

### Chickenpox

The child may return to school once all the chicken pox lesions are crusted over.

### Diarrhea

Loose stools have many causes; a child should not attend school until the bowel movements have normal consistency. This reduces the chance of leakage or contaminating the child's hands. In addition, children with diarrhea that contains blood or mucus should be kept home until their physician evaluates them. Children with Escherichia coli or Shigella infections should be kept home until diarrhea resolves and two stool cultures are negative for the organisms.

### Earache

Never ignore an earache. Keep your child home and contact your physician. If there is ear discharge, even without pain, notify the doctor, as this generally means a ruptured eardrum (a draining ear is not contagious).

### Fever

A normal temperature is 98.6 degrees. After illness, temperature should be normal for 24 hours before sending a child to school. If a child has a fever 100.8 degrees or higher during the night, he or she should not attend school in the morning, even if the temperature is normal. Temperatures are lower in the morning and the fever may occur again in the afternoon. Temperature is also influenced by activity, diet, and environment. Fever in itself is not contagious but additional symptoms associated with fever may indicate a potentially contagious illness.

### Fifth Disease

By the time the lacey red or "slapped cheek" rash is visible, the affected child is no longer infectious. Therefore, they can return to school and exclusion from class is unnecessary.

### Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease

This illness is non-serious, but is especially uncomfortable. While exclusion from school is not necessary, the child should be kept at home if they have an elevated temperature or the mouth sores make them too uncomfortable to attend school.

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### Head Lice

Head lice pass from child to child on clothing, bed linens, combs, brushes, and hats, but the louse does not jump from one child to another. The child may return to school after treatment is completed. The child may be examined by the school nurse or designated personnel for signs of an active infection. Medical experts feel a child should not be excluded from school because of the presence of nits. Students who are distracted by itching or who have open places on their scalp from scratching may need to go home before the end of the school day to begin treatment. If this is the case, parents are encouraged to promptly pick up their child and treat the condition. Students *without* undue itching or open places on their scalp who have been found to have live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun.

### Hepatitis

A child with Hepatitis A should remain home for one week after the start of the illness. Brook Hill requires a physician's note before a child with either Hepatitis A, B, or C, is permitted back in class. Some children with hepatitis can be asymptomatic and still be contagious.

### Impetigo

Children with impetigo requiring antibiotics may return to school 24 hours after they have begun taking the antibiotics. Brook Hill requires that the lesions be covered.

### Infectious Mononucleosis

The child may return to school once cleared by their physician. Despite many myths to the contrary, the virus that causes "mono" has an extremely low communicability. Absence from school varies among teenagers with mono and depends on how much energy they have to attend class. For example, some teens may tolerate attending school full time, while others may need to be off for several weeks.

### Measles

Child may return to school 4 days after the onset of the rash. Since children are required to be immunized against measles, a child who has been diagnosed with this condition may have another reason for the rash. A physician's note is required for return to school.

### Mumps

Child should remain home until 5 days after the beginning of parotid gland swelling. Since children are required to be immunized against mumps, a child who has been diagnosed with this condition may have another reason for the swelling. A physician's note is required for return to school.

### Pink Eye

If the child is old enough to be responsible about hand washing (usually school age), exclusion from school or activities is not necessary. Parents will be notified when potential conjunctivitis is detected at school. It is best for students to be on antibiotics for 24 hours and have resolution of their symptoms before returning to school. Pre-school and Kindergarten students may not be responsible enough about hand washing to prevent the spread of infection, therefore, it is probably best to keep them at home for a couple of days until either the condition clears on its own or a physician has looked at it and states it is not contagious. Unfortunately, the length of time that a child is excluded from school will depend on the resolution of the infection.

### Pinworms

A child with this parasitic condition need not be excluded from school, but good hand washing, particularly after using the restroom, should be required. Since pinworms exit at night, the child is most contagious in the morning, so good hand washing at school first thing is a good idea.

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### Rash

A rash is usually a sign of a viral illness. It may also be a reaction to a medication or chemical (plant, detergents). If your child has an unusual rash or it is associated with a fever, it is probably best to keep your child at home until you have had a chance to discuss the condition with your physician. Most viral rashes are not contagious, so parents should use their own common sense. For example, if your child has an allergic rash and is taking an antihistamine to prevent itching, it might be a good idea to keep them home since these medications tend to make kids sleepy.

### Ringworm

The Committee on Infectious Diseases of the American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that children receiving treatment for ringworm may attend school. Haircuts, shaving of the head, or wearing a cap during treatment are not necessary. Lesions should be covered as possible. It is impractical to keep children out of school for the 4-8 weeks it takes to completely eradicate the infection.

### Roseola

Students with any rash and fever should not return to school until their fever is gone. It is believed that children are contagious from a few days before the fever until onset of the rash.

### Scarlet Fever and Strep Throat

A child diagnosed with strep throat may return to school 24 hours after the child has been on antibiotic therapy.

### Tuberculosis

Children with tuberculosis infection or disease can attend school or childcare if they are receiving therapy. Brook Hill requires a letter from the child's physician indicating that they are no longer contagious.

### Vomiting

If a child vomits during the night, it is probably not a good idea to send them to school in the morning. What he or she needs is rest and either a liquid or soft diet.

### Whooping Cough

Child should remain home until they have been on antibiotics (erythromycin) for five days. Since children are required to be immunized against whooping cough, a child who has been diagnosed with this condition may have another reason for the cough. A physician's note is required for return to school.