

How sick is too sick?

A guide to when a child should stay home from school

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Children catch illnesses nearly as often as it rains in Seattle. So how sick is too sick, when it comes to a child going to school? At Kirkland Preschool we defer to the CDC, Seattle Children's Hospital and Washington State Department of Health. We have developed the following guidelines for our school, including our school families and staff.

1. **Does the child have a fever?** If the child has a fever, they should stay home. A fever is the body's natural defense mechanism for combating germs and illness. By increasing the body temperature, the body is able to destroy the germs making it sick. At Kirkland Preschool we ask that you keep your child home until they are fever-free for 24 hours. If a child develops a fever while at Kirkland Preschool our staff will take the child's temperature to confirm the fever and then call the parent/guardian.

What defines a fever (Barton D. Schmitt, 2011):

- Rectal, Ear or Temporal artery temperature of 100.4 degrees F, or higher
- Pacifier or Oral temperature of 100 degrees F or higher
- Axillary (armpit) temperature of 99 degrees F or higher

There are several myths about fevers. Seattle Children's Hospital has addressed many of these myths on their website: <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/myths-about-fever/>

2. **Are they vomiting or have they recently vomited?** Vomiting is another way that our body protects itself. The main cause of vomiting is gastroenteritis (stomach infection), otherwise nicknamed the, "stomach flu". This type of stomach infection is caused from a stomach virus and can often come with nausea and abdominal discomfort before vomiting, and may also be accompanied by diarrhea. *Please note that there are other causes for vomiting, so please consult with your pediatrician or doctor office for medical advice.* Gastroenteritis can be highly contagious. Please keep your child home from school until they have not vomited for 24 hours and are fever free. *Also note, the stomach flu (gastroenteritis) is NOT the same as the flu / influenza (seasonal). Seasonal influenza is a viral infection of the nose, throat, trachea and bronchi (small branches in the lungs), and the influenza viruses change from year to year.*
3. **Does the child have diarrhea?** As defined by Seattle Children's Hospital, Diarrhea is the sudden increase in the frequency and looseness of stools. If your child has diarrhea please keep them home from school. They may return to school once their stools are formed and any fever is gone.
4. **Is the child well enough to actively participate and engage throughout the entire class session?** Fatigue and feeling "not right" or "bad" is a sign of illness. It can also be just that, a sign of fatigue. If your child is too out of sorts, run down, or tired to enjoy their day at school and actively engage in- and participate with- the activities they should stay home. Your child may return to school when they are feeling well enough to participate in normal activities.

We understand that gauging a child's illness and whether or not they should go to school can be very difficult. Here are a few other common things children may experience and what we ask of families with regards to when a child should stay home or if they are okay to come to school. There is also a link to the Seattle Children's Hospital website for further information about each topic.



Allergies- Allergies are not contagious. Children may come to school if they do not have any symptoms outlined in items 1-3 above and is feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in their class. If your child has serious allergies, please make sure that the school knows about them. If your child has anaphylaxis reactions to any allergens, please also make sure that we have written doctors orders and any prescribed medication at school in case a reaction should occur.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/kids-health/page.aspx?id=60026>

Cold and/or cough (mild)- For all practical purposes, there is no way to prevent the spread of a cold. Coughs commonly accompany a cold. It is not necessary to keep a child home, as long as they are fever free, and feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in their class.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/colds/>

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/cough/>

Diarrhea- As explained above in item number 3, children need to stay home until their stools are formed. Please keep your child well hydrated if they have diarrhea.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/diarrhea/>

Earaches- earaches are not contagious. There is no need to keep a child at home for a mild earache, unless your child is not feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in with their class.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/earache/>

Fever- As explained above in item number 1, children need to stay home if they have a fever of 100.4 degrees F, or higher. Wait until they are fever-free for 24 hours before sending them back to school.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/fever/>

Headaches- Headaches can be a symptom of an illness, and often accompanies viral infections. Headaches can also be triggered by dehydration, skipping a meal, stress, lack of sleep, loud noises, strong smells, and even consuming certain foods. If your child doesn't exhibit any other signs of illness listed above in items 1-3, and is feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in their class they may come to school.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/headache/>

Head Lice- PLEASE do not send your child to school if they have head lice! Lice is highly contagious. Your child may return to school once they are lice AND nit free.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/kids-health/page.aspx?id=60496>



Nasal Congestion / Sinus Pain- A runny nose can be caused by many factors such as, an illness, weather changes, or allergies. Nasal discharge (yes, snot) usually changes color during different stages of a cold and can also vary in color based on other factors such as humidity. Snot is normal for everyone. It is just that at younger ages some children have yet to learn how to blow their nose or when to blow their nose. If your child has yellow or green nasal secretions in combination with [1] sinus pain, or [2] the return of a fever after it has gone for over 24 hours, or [3] nasal discharge that lasts for over 14 days without improvement we ask that you please have your child checked by a pediatrician to ensure your child does not have a sinus infection. Otherwise, they may come to school if they have no other symptoms listed above in 1-3, and they feel well enough to engage and actively participate in their class. Our staff will encourage your child to use a tissue when necessary or when needed help a child with wiping their nose. We will also encourage them to wash their hands afterwards.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/sinus-pain/>

Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)- Pink eye is caused by bacteria and is contagious. We ask that a child with pink eye stay home until they have been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours, and are feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in their class.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/kids-health/page.aspx?id=59749>

Rashes- Rashes can be a sign of a contagious condition or a reaction to something the body did not like (such as allergies or certain plant exposures). Please keep your child home until their rash has been diagnosed by a doctor. Your child can return to school when the rash ends, or with doctor approval.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/kids-health/page.aspx?id=60253>

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/rashes-widespread/>

Sore throat- A sore throat can be a symptom of a common cold or something more serious like strep throat. If associated with a cold your child may come to school if they do not have the symptoms outlined above in 1-3 and are feeling well enough to engage and actively participate in their class. If the sore throat is accompanied by signs or symptoms of strep throat, please have your child seen by your pediatrician prior to coming to school. Children with strep throat must be on antibiotics for at least 24 hours before returning to school.

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/sore-throat/>

As you know, there are a lot of illnesses and ailments out there. Our children get hit the hardest as their immune systems are still young and developing. With many illnesses there is a large grey area of whether or not a child should attend school. And that decision varies from family to family. Our advice, as you have probably picked up by now, When in doubt, defer to number 4- is your child well enough to really enjoy school and actively participate? If not, keep them home until they can. Our goal is for preschool to be a memorable, enjoyable experience that builds a strong foundation for their future education. It's hard to have fun, when you just feel plain crummy.

Kirkland Preschool also encourages you to teach your child to cough into their elbow (not their hand!) as a way to prevent the spread of germs. We also ask families to help practice good hand washing to help your child learn how to prevent the spread of germs.



For information on more medical conditions, please consult with your pediatrician, or the following websites to learn more:

Seattle Children's Hospital- <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/a-z/#c>.

Center for Disease Control- <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Washington State Department of Health- <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily.aspx>

For additional questions, regarding our illness policies, please contact

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DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice. It is provided as an guide to Kirkland Preschool's illness policies and procedures and for educational purposes only. You assume full responsibility for how you choose to use this information. If you or your child is having serious illness or injury related problems seek the advice your healthcare professional or in emergencies call 911.

Bibliography & Works Cited:

Author: Barton D. Schmitt, M. *Medical Conditions Index*. Retrieved October 26, 2012, from Seattle Children's Hospital Website: <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/medical-conditions/symptom-index/> Copyright 1994-2012.