

Nurses Notes from Pennridge South Middle School

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Too Sick for School???

Seasons change and winter colds are replaced by allergies, asthma, and other illnesses. You don't want your child to miss school; but neither do you want to send a sick child to school and endanger him or her and other children as well. When *should* your child stay home from school?

Here are a few guidelines you might wish to follow:

↳ **A runny nose**, or “leaky faucet,” is the way many children respond to pollen, dust, chalk, or simply a change of season. If it isn't a common cold, then it's an allergy and allergies aren't contagious. Don't keep the child home.

↳ **A bad cough or cold symptoms** can indicate a severe cold, bronchitis, flu, or even pneumonia. Some children suffer one cold after another all winter long and a run-of-the-mill cold should not be a reason to miss school. But if your child is not acting “right,” has difficulty breathing, or is becoming dehydrated, it could be serious. Check with your doctor right away.

↳ **Diarrhea and vomiting** make children very uncomfortable, and being near a bathroom becomes a top priority. If your child has repeated episodes of diarrhea and vomiting, accompanied by fever, a rash, or general weakness, consult a doctor and keep your child out of school until the illness passes. No child with diarrhea or vomiting should be in school.

↳ **Fever** is an important symptom. When it occurs along with a sore throat, an earache, nausea, listlessness, or a rash, your child may be contagious. Most doctors advise parents to keep children home during the course of a fever and for an additional 24 hours after the fever has passed.

↳ **Strep throat and scarlet fever** are two highly contagious conditions caused by a streptococcal (bacterial) infection. They usually arrive with a sore throat and high fever. Some 12 to 48 hours after the onset of scarlet fever, a rash will also appear. A child with either strep throat or scarlet fever should be kept home and treated with antibiotics, as prescribed by a doctor. After 24 hours on an antibiotic, a child is usually no longer contagious.

↳ **Chicken pox**, a viral disease, is very uncomfortable and extremely contagious. If your child has a fever, is itching, and begins to sprout pink or red spots (with “watery” centers) on the back, chest, and/or face, the chances are good it is chicken pox. Please tell us if it is; it's important that schools know this information. Keep your child home for at least a week from the time you first notice the symptoms and at least two days after the last spot has appeared and all lesions are dried.

↳ **Conjunctivitis or pink eye** is highly contagious and uncomfortable, so take heed when your child complains of any eye or eyes burning, itching, and producing a whitish discharge. Minor cases (caused by a virus) and severe cases (caused by bacteria) require treatment with prescription eye drops.

↳ **Measles (or Rubeola)** is a viral infection that attacks a child's respiratory system, causing a dry, hacking cough, general weariness, inflamed eyes, and fever. If these symptoms appear, keep your child at home and consult your doctor right away to avert more serious complications. If it is confirmed as measles, please let us know so we may be alert to symptoms appearing among other children at school. The measles rash of tiny hard red bumps will next appear on the child's face, behind the ears, and down the body. Your doctor may advise you to keep your child home for several days after the rash has disappeared. A doctor's note is necessary to return to school.

↳ **Fifth Disease** is a mildly contagious viral infection. The onset of the disease consists of one to two days of low-grade fever and malaise. The most striking feature is a rash, starting on the cheeks and spreading to the arms and thighs. After the rash has faded it may reappear in response to sunlight, heat, cold, and exercise. Isolation is not necessary. If there are no symptoms other than the rash, the child need not be excluded from school.

↳ **Lice**, once brought into a home or school, can quickly produce wholesale itching and scratching. Lice are tiny parasites (like ticks) that thrive on the warm, damp scalps of children. Caution your child against sharing anybody else's combs and brushes, especially hats. If your child becomes a "host" to lice, check with your doctor for the most effective way to treat your child – and all the child's clothing and bedding. Also notify the school so that classmates may be checked.

↳ **Ear infections**, unless properly treated, can cause permanent hearing damage. Here again you should follow the 24-hour rule for fever and antibiotic therapy.

↳ **Impetigo** is a skin condition caused by either a staphylococcal or streptococcus. It starts as an isolated pustule which ruptures and becomes crusted. Antibiotic treatment is necessary.

Helpful Hints

Enjoy breakfast with your child. Take this time to assess your child (Is he/she too ill for school? – then keep them home).

Take your child's temperature. 100 degrees or greater indicates your child needs to stay home (every home should have a thermometer).

Remember: The school nurse is not a substitute for your MD/Health Care Provider. Please see your MD/Health Care Provider for any illness, rash, injury, or questionable behavior.

Tip: Good hand washing is the best defense against the spread of germs

Stay current with the state mandated requirements (immunizations and health screenings) for your child's grade level.

A healthy well child learns best. Encourage your child to eat nourishing foods, exercise daily, and get adequate sleep.