

When Kids Need a Sick Day

“Mom, I don’t feel good.”

When this is how kids start their day, it can throw a kink into the morning routine—not to mention send parents into a panic. Is this stomachache a ploy to play hooky, or should your little one stay home and get some rest?

When trying to decide if your child should take a sick day from school, consider the following symptoms.

When to stay home from school with a fever

“**Fevers** are often a sign that your child is fighting off a viral or bacterial infection that could get other kids sick,” explained **Tracy Nailor, MD, MPH**, Pediatric Urgent Care Physician at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. “**Ware County School System** requires children to be fever-free without the use of medicine for at least 24 hours before returning to school.”

Keep your child home if he:

- Has a temperature higher than 100.3.
- Is vomiting or has diarrhea.
- Isn’t acting like himself.
- Has other **flu-like symptoms**, such as chills or body aches.

Call your pediatrician immediately if the fever is accompanied by:

- Headache
- Rash
- Stiff neck

When to stay home from school with a sore throat

“A scratchy throat is a common symptom of many different types of illness, but the most contagious, strep throat, means your child should rest at home and see a pediatrician to begin treatment with antibiotics, warned Dr. Nailor.

Keep your child home if:

- The sore throat is accompanied by fever, headache, chills or a stomachache.
- His throat and tonsils are bright red or have white spots on them.

When to stay home from school with a stomach-ache

“Stomachaches and abdominal pain can have many causes, and if your child’s pain or discomfort is persistent or crippling, it’s best to contact his pediatrician,” said Dr. Nailor.

Keep your child home if:

- The pain is accompanied by fever, vomiting, diarrhea or a painful sore throat.
- The stomach pain limits his ability to participate in his regular daily activities.

When to stay home from school with ear pain

Dr. Nailor said, “Even though they aren’t always contagious, ear-aches can be very uncomfortable for a child and may require a trip to the pediatrician.”

Keep your child home if:

- He also has a fever of 100.3 or higher.
- He acts lethargic, fussy or uncomfortable, or in a way that’s not like himself.
- There is discharge coming from the ear.
- He is also experiencing nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

When to stay home from school with watery, itchy and red eyes

“Red, itchy eyes are common symptoms of allergies, which shouldn’t keep a child home from school,” advised Dr. Nailor. “These can also be symptoms of pink eye, a contagious infection that requires treatment from a doctor.”

Keep your child home if:

- He also has a fever.
- Drainage or mucous is coming from one or both eyes.
- One or both eyes are crusty.
- He is complaining of discomfort in the eye—many kids say it feels like they have sand in their eye.
- One or both eye lids is swollen.

At the end of the day, you know your child best. If he isn’t acting like himself, or it doesn’t seem like he could participate in school activities, trust your instincts and keep your kid at home. Often a quick call to the pediatrician can help put your mind at ease, even if your child doesn’t need to be seen.