



The Flu: When to Keep Your Child Home from School

Knowing when to keep your child home from school can be a difficult decision to make. For some parents this means missing work, and no one wants their child's learning to be interrupted. However, if your child has a serious illness such as influenza, it is very important that your child stay home from school. This will assist us in preventing the spread of illness to other students. Please see the frequently asked questions on the next page which will assist you in this decision-making process during this flu season.

What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. They cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year. The flu can be very dangerous for children. Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years old are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.

How serious is the flu?

The illness can vary from mild to severe. It can be especially dangerous for young children and children of any age who have certain long-term health conditions. These include asthma (even mild or controlled), neurological conditions, chronic lung disease, heart disease, blood disorders, endocrine disorders such as diabetes, and weakened immune systems. A child with one of these conditions could be in your child's classroom, so it is critical that you keep your child at home if they are showing symptoms of the flu.

It is important to know the difference between cold and flu.

Cold	Symptom	Flu
Pretty rare	Fever	Usually present
Slight body aches & pains	Aches	Severe aches & pains
Uncommon	Chills	Fairly common
Fairly mild	Fatigue	Moderate to severe
Develop over a few days	Sudden Symptoms	Rapid onset of 3-6 hrs.
Hacking & productive	Coughing	Dry and nonproductive
Common	Sneezing	Uncommon
Common	Stuffy Nose	Uncommon
Mild to moderate	Sore Throat	Uncommon
Mild to moderate	Chest Discomfort	Often severe
Fairly uncommon	Headache	Very common

Should I keep my child home from school if they have cold or flu symptoms? Is your advice different for a cold versus the flu?

If your child has flu symptoms, you should keep them home from school. If your child has a cold, the decision to keep them home may depend on the severity of symptoms.

How long should I keep my child home from school?

Keep your child at home from school or daycare for *at least* 24 hours after their fever is gone. Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen. A fever is defined as a temperature 100°F or higher.

How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

The flu virus can be shared from 1 day before getting sick to 5-7 days afterwards. Some people, however, can be contagious for even longer. This would include children and people with weakened immune systems.

Should I call the doctor if I think my child has the flu?

If a child experiences flu symptoms, parents should contact their child's doctor. Some children may benefit from an antiviral medication, which can be prescribed by a doctor and can help lessen the number of days that a child is sick with the virus. To be effective, antiviral medication should be taken within 12-48 hours after flu symptoms begin.

What are some ways I can protect my child against the flu?

Teach and practice healthy habits:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw the tissue away in the trash after you use it.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If someone in the household is sick, try to keep the sick person in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters and toys for children clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.
- Throw tissues and other disposable items used by sick persons in your household in the trash.

These everyday steps are a good way to reduce your chances of getting all sorts of illnesses, but a yearly flu vaccine is always the best way to specifically prevent the flu (CDC, 2011).

Information obtained from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov>

If you have additional questions, please contact a Corvallis School District Nurse:

Trish Pokrzywa, R.N. 541-757-3854

Jen Coppock R.N. 541-757-4527

Emily Muravez R.N. 541-757-5700

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541-757-5840 | 1555 SW 35th Street, Corvallis, OR 97333