



# How Sick is Too Sick?

## When Children and Staff Should Stay Home from School or Child Care

Evaluation of a sick child must consider which diseases are currently circulating among students, staff, and the community. Known exposure to cases or an outbreak of a contagious disease (including but not limited to those listed here), even without a confirmed diagnosis, may necessitate more stringent return to school requirements.

During Colorado's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, children and staff who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should receive testing, and follow the [COVID-19 isolation guidance](#) until testing is completed or if they test positive. If the individual tests negative for COVID-19, the individual should then follow the recommendations for their disease or symptoms using the below guidance.

### There are four main reasons to keep children and adults at home:

1. The child or staff is at risk of infecting others with COVID-19 or another contagious illness, either because of symptoms or recent close contact.
2. The child or staff member does not feel well enough to take part in usual activities. For example, a child is overly tired, fussy or will not stop crying.
3. A child needs more care than teachers and staff can give while still caring for the other children.
4. The child or staff member has symptoms or an illness is on this list, and staying home is required.





Guidance for COVID-19 Symptoms	Child or staff member must stay home?
<p><b>COVID-19 symptoms which must be <i>fully resolved</i> before a child or staff member returns to school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Feeling Feverish, having chills or Fever</b> (Temperature of 100.4°F or greater. Babies who are 4 months or younger need to see a doctor right away for a fever of 100°F or higher)</li> <li>● <b>Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing</b></li> <li>● <b>Nausea, Vomiting/Throwing Up</b></li> <li>● <b>Diarrhea</b> (Frequent, loose, or watery stools (poop) compared to normal ones that are not caused by food or medicine)</li> <li>● <b>Cough*</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Yes</b> - These symptoms are often present in individuals with COVID-19 and other contagious infectious disease, and a person with any of these symptoms (whether new or worsening from baseline) should first receive a diagnostic test for COVID-19.</p> <p><b>When to seek emergency medical attention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Trouble breathing</b></li> <li>● <b>Persistent pain or pressure in the chest</b></li> <li>● <b>New confusion</b></li> <li>● <b>Inability to wake or stay awake</b></li> <li>● <b>Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips or nail beds, depending on skin tone</b></li> </ul> <p>These are not all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you.            Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility. Notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.</p> <p>If all symptoms are consistent with the usual symptoms of a known chronic condition and the child is otherwise well enough to return to school, no further evaluation is necessary.</p> <p>If the test is positive, or the individual has not yet been tested, the individual should follow CDPHE’s isolation guidance, <a href="https://covid19.colorado.gov/isolation-and-quarantine">https://covid19.colorado.gov/isolation-and-quarantine</a>. Further guidance for the school or child care can be found at <a href="https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance">https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance</a>.</p> <p>If the test is negative AND the symptoms are explained by a specific illness other than COVID-19, then the child or staff can return to school or child care following exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p> <p>If the test is negative and the illness is not explained by a new illness or a known chronic condition, the ill individual should still stay home until symptoms have been resolved for at least 24 hours without medication.</p> <p>*Students and staff may return if the cough is not fully resolved following discussion with a care provider.</p>
<p><b>COVID-19 symptoms which must be <i>improving</i> before a child or staff member returns to school or child care</b></p>	<p><b>Yes</b> - These symptoms are often present in individuals with COVID-19, and a person with any of these symptoms (whether new or worsening from baseline) should receive a diagnostic test for COVID-19. If all symptoms are consistent with the usual symptoms of a known chronic condition and</p>





<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sore throat</li> <li>● Runny nose or congestion</li> <li>● Muscle or body aches</li> <li>● Headache</li> <li>● Fatigue</li> <li>● New Loss of Taste or Smell**</li> </ul>	<p>the child is otherwise well enough to return to school, no further evaluation is necessary.</p> <p>If the diagnostic COVID test is positive, or the individual has not yet been tested, the individual should follow CDPHE’s isolation guidance, <a href="https://covid19.colorado.gov/isolation-and-quarantine">https://covid19.colorado.gov/isolation-and-quarantine</a>. Further guidance can be found at <a href="https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance">https://covid19.colorado.gov/practical-guide-for-operationalizing-cdc-school-guidance</a>.</p> <p>If the diagnostic test is negative and the symptoms are explained by a specific illness other than COVID-19, then the child or staff can return to school or child care following exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p> <p>If the COVID test is negative and the illness is <b>not</b> explained by a new illness or a known chronic condition, the ill individual may return to school as long as all symptoms are improving and cough, shortness of breath, fever, diarrhea and vomiting have fully resolved.</p> <p>**Loss of taste or smell can persist for weeks or months. This condition does not need to be resolved or improving before an individual returns to school or care.</p>
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Guidance for Symptoms Not Due to a Specific Disease, Following a Negative COVID Test	Child or staff must stay home?
<p><b>Diarrhea</b>            Frequent, loose, or watery stools (poop) compared to normal ones that are not caused by food or medicine.</p>	<p><b>Yes</b> - Unless the diarrhea is related to an existing chronic condition, is explained by a diagnosed condition not requiring the person to stay home, or is consistent with the person's baseline.</p> <p>The child or staff member may return to school or child care 24 hours after their last episode of diarrhea unless the diarrhea is caused by an illness that requires them to stay home longer. If the diarrhea is explained by a specific illness, then the child or staff can return to school or child care following exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p>
<p><b>Fever</b>            Fever is a temperature of 100.4°F or greater. Babies who are 4 months or younger need to see a doctor right away for a fever of 100°F or higher.</p>	<p><b>Yes</b> - The child or staff member may return to school or child care if the fever has been resolved for 24 hours without fever reducing medications unless the fever is caused by an illness that requires them to stay home longer. If the fever is explained by a specific illness COVID-19, then the child or staff can return to school or child care following exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p>
<p><b>Flu-like Symptoms</b>            Fever            Sore throat            Runny nose or congestion</p>	<p><b>Yes</b> - Children and staff may return to school or child care as long as they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications and other symptoms are improving, unless the symptoms are caused by an illness that requires them to stay home longer. If the symptoms can be explained by a specific illness, then follow the exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p> <p>In consultation with a healthcare provider, additional evaluation for flu-like illnesses, sore throat, and upper respiratory symptoms may be appropriate, including evaluation for strep throat.</p>
<p><b>Vomiting/Throwing Up</b></p>	<p><b>Yes</b> - Unless the vomiting is related to an existing chronic condition or is explained by a diagnosed condition not requiring the person to stay home. If the vomiting is unexplained and inconsistent with the person's baseline state of health, the child or staff member may return 24 hours after their last episode of vomiting. If the vomiting can be explained by a specific illness, then follow the exclusion guidelines for that illness.</p> <p><b>If a child with a recent head injury vomits, seek medical attention.</b></p>





Guidance for Specific Diagnosed Illnesses	Child or staff must stay home?
Chicken Pox	Yes - until the blisters have dried and crusted (usually 6 days), or in immunized people without crusting, until no lesions within 24 hour period.
Conjunctivitis (pink eye) Pink color of eye and thick yellow/green discharge	No - children and adults do not need to stay home unless they have a fever or are not able to participate in usual activities. Call your doctor for advice and possible treatment.
COVID-19 (clinical diagnosis, symptoms without testing, or a positive diagnostic test)	Yes - children and staff who have suspected COVID-19 or who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 must be excluded and follow CDPHE's <a href="#">isolation guidance</a> . Guidance for schools and child care settings can be found here: <a href="https://covid19.colorado.gov/cases-and-outbreaks-child-care-schools">https://covid19.colorado.gov/cases-and-outbreaks-child-care-schools</a> .
Fifth's Disease (parvovirus)	No - the illness is no longer contagious once the rash appears.
Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (Coxsackie virus)	No - unless the child or adult meets other exclusion criteria, is drooling uncontrollably and has mouth sores or is not able to take part in usual activities.
Head Lice or Scabies	Yes - children may stay at school or child care until the end of the day but cannot return until after they have had the first treatment.
Hepatitis A, Salmonella, Shigella, or Shiga-toxin Producing E. coli	Yes - children and staff may return to school or child care when cleared by the health department.
Herpes	No - unless there are open sores that cannot be covered or there is uncontrollable drooling.
Impetigo	Yes - children and adults need to stay home until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has started.
Influenza	Yes - children and staff should remain out of school or child care until they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications and other symptoms have been improving for 24 hours.
Norovirus	Yes - exclude children and staff for at least 48 hours after their last episode of vomiting and/or diarrhea.
Ringworm	Yes - children may stay at school or child care until the end of the day but cannot return until after they have had the first treatment. Keep the area covered for the first 3 days if participating in activities with person to person contact.





Guidance for Specific Diagnosed Illnesses	Child or staff must stay home?
Roseola	<b>No</b> - unless there is a fever or behavior changes.
Croup, RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)	<b>Yes</b> - Children and staff should remain out of school or child care until they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications and other symptoms have been improving for 24 hours.
Strep Throat	<b>Yes</b> - for 12 hours after starting antibiotics unless the doctor says that it is okay to return to school sooner.
Other Vaccine Preventable Diseases Measles, Mumps, Rubella (German Measles), Pertussis (Whooping Cough)	<b>Yes</b> - Children and staff can return to school once they are no longer contagious (see Infectious Disease Guidelines). Public health consultation may be necessary.
Yeast Infections Thrush or Candida diaper rash	<b>No</b> - follow good hand washing and hygiene practices.
Other Symptoms or illnesses not listed	Contact the child care center director or school health staff to see if the child or staff member needs to stay home (see Infectious Disease Guidelines).

This document was developed in collaboration with pediatricians, medical epidemiologists and public health professionals.

The information presented is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of your personal doctor’s advice and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information should not be used in place of a visit, call or consultation or advice of your doctor or other health care provider.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. *Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools: A Quick Reference Guide*. Aronson SS, Shope TR, eds. 5th ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2020.20.  
 Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. *Infectious Diseases In Child Care and School Settings: Guidelines for Child Care Providers and Health Consultants, School Nurses and Other Personnel*. 2022.  
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