THE PEDIATRICIAN MOM

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Guidelines for returning to school after sickness

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RSV & STREP THROAT

For all these illnesses, make sure you check out the relevant posts on the website (or Instagram) for more answers and recommendations. This guide provides a really quick overview of how each is transmitted and how to think about returning to school or daycare. Remember, at the end of the day, your pediatrician is going to be the best person to advise you about return to school recommendations for your child specifically. But here are some general guidelines that are worth keeping in mind.

RSV

- Common respiratory illness that can range in severity. Typically gets worse before it gets better (days 3-5 of illness are often the worst).
- Incubation period is 4-6 days, but can range from 2-8 days.
- Spreads from person to person in respiratory droplets, but can live on surfaces for long periods as well.
- Kids are ***most*** contagious for the first week after they begin symptoms, but some children (especially those with weaker immune systems) can be contagious for up to 4 weeks.

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Feeling better, fever free without medications for 24h and able to stay hydrated.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands well with soap and water, minimizing close contact, masking and wiping frequently trafficked surfaces such as doorknobs and counters.
- Read more here.

STREP THROAT

- Symptoms usually have a sudden onset. Sore throat *without* respiratory symptoms (such as cold, cough) is common, along with fever, swollen lymph nodes, abdominal pain or vomiting, headache.
- Must be treated with an antibiotic and it is crucial to take it for **the whole 10 day period,** not just until your child feels better.
- Can return to childcare / school **12 hours** after starting antibiotic (old recommendation used to be 24h).
- Spreads via respiratory droplets, contact with secretions (saliva, impetigo wounds) and via food or surfaces, though less so than others.
- Incubation period is 2-5 days.

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Your child has been on antibiotics for **12 hours** and is feeling better, fever free and able to stay hydrated.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands well with soap and water, minimizing close contact and wiping frequently trafficked surfaces such as doorknobs and counters.
- Read more here.

IMPETIGO, PINKEYE, POISON IVY & INFLUENZA A / B

IMPETIGO

- Impetigo is usually caused by Strep or Staph bacteria. Similar parameters for returning to school apply as strep throat.
- Read more here.

PINKEYE (OR CONJUNCTIVITIS)

- Pinkeye is usually viral, but often-times schools and daycares have policies requiring antibiotic treatment to return. This does not make sense and is not in keeping with the most updated guidelines from the AAP.
- The AAP guidelines no longer recommend exclusion for pinkeye (or even eye discharge) if there is no fever or behavioral change. The reason for this is that we don't have great evidence that keeping a child home makes much of a difference when it comes to transmission to others - similar to cold symptoms, for viral conjunctivitis in particular by the time symptoms occur, the ship has sailed.
- In some cases, pinkeye may be bacterial. But even in this case, antibiotic treatment and exclusion from school are not necessarily recommended. This is a judgment call on the part of your clinician and school though.
- In general, infectious pinkeye is highly contagious. Certain causes, such as adenovirus, can spread via direct contact, as well as on surfaces and in bodily fluids.
- The best way to prevent transmission is to wash hands, avoid touching the eyes / face, and to wipe countertops and other surfaces. Do not share towels, pillows, etc.
- Check out this post for more information on pinkeye (including tips and tricks to help tease apart viral vs. bacterial vs. allergic causes).

POISON IVY

- The rash is not contagious. But it CAN spread if there is lingering oil underneath fingernails or on surfaces. It is fine to return to school. More here.

INFLUENZA A / B

- Influenza A and B can vary in severity and is typically seen in the US between October and March.
- Certain groups are at higher risk for severe illness, including those under age 5y.
- Incubation period is 1-4 days after exposure.
- Most contagious in the first few days of illness, although the pattern of viral infectivity varies a bit depending on the strain. Influenza B can actually be transmitted before symptoms even begin. Most of the time, you are no longer contagious about a week in.
- Spreads from person to person via respiratory secretions (sneezing, coughing, talking), contact with contaminated objects, and aerosolized particles that are released in the air during breathing.

INFLUENZA A / B (CONTD) & THE STOMACH FLU

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Feeling better, no longer fatigued, fever free without medications for 24h and able to stay hydrated.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands with soap and water, minimizing close contact, and wiping frequently trafficked surfaces frequently. And the flu shot makes a huge difference when it comes to minimizing severity and duration of illness.
- Read more here.

NOROVIRUS (STOMACH FLU, GASTROENTERITIS)

- Viral gastroenteritis is awful, and can cause dramatic symptoms that begin suddenly. Unfortunately, the symptom profile and infectivity can vary a little depending on the specific viral cause. We're going to focus on Norovirus because it is the most common cause and also because if you follow these recommendations, you're likely covered.
- Often, the illness begins with abdominal pain and vomiting (usually gone within 12-72h) followed by diarrhea, which can linger for up to 7-14 days.
- Incubation period is 1-3 days after exposure.
- Norovirus can be contagious for several weeks after the infection itself. It can also linger on surfaces for *months* and is resistant to heat (can survive temps as high as 145F).
- Spreads from person to person via direct contact (sharing food, utensils), consuming contaminated food or drink, fecal-oral transmission (eg after diaper changes) and contact with contaminated surfaces.

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Feeling better, have not vomited or had a fever in >24h (without medication), able to eat and drink normally and diarrhea has improved.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands vigorously with soap and water, minimizing close contact, and wiping frequently trafficked surfaces with paper towels and then disinfect using a bleach-based household cleaner that you leave on the surface for at least 5 minutes before washing off with soap and hot water. For other tips, including how to manage laundry and disinfect toys, click here.

CROUP & HFM

CROUP

- Croup is the name given to a specific barky cough which is caused by a narrowed upper airway. It can be caused by a range of different viruses (although the most common is called Parainfluenza).
- Incubation period and infectivity can vary based on the specific cause, but in general, a good ballpark for incubation period is 2-7 days after exposure
- Spreads from person to person via respiratory secretions, and sometimes via contact or on surfaces.

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Feeling better (able to stay hydrated, acting more like themselves) and fever free for >24h without medications.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands well with soap and water, minimizing close contact, masking, and wiping frequently trafficked surfaces such as doorknobs and counters
- Read more here.

HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH

- HFM is caused by Coxsackie virus, although there are multiple strains which range in severity.
- Incubation period can range from 2-7 days.
- Infectivity can vary from person-to-person, but virus can be shed in the stool for several weeks.
- Spreads from person to person via respiratory secretions, fecal-oral shedding (wash your hands after those diaper changes) or contact with the fluid that oozes from sores.

RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN...

- Feeling better (able to stay hydrated, acting more like themselves), fever free for >24h without medications, rash is no longer continuing to spread and all sores have been scabbed over.

MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION BY...

- Washing hands well with soap and water and minimizing close contact.
- Read more here.