

Truth or fib? When kids say they're too sick for school

22 August 2016



(HealthDay)—It's only a matter of time after school begins before parents have to deal with a child who doesn't feel well enough to go.

If your [child](#) complains of a [headache](#), he or she probably isn't faking, said Dr. Jennifer Caudle. She is an assistant professor of [family medicine](#) at Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Stratford, N.J.

Stress, lack of sleep or changes in diet can all contribute to headaches in children at the start of a new school year, she said in a university news release.

Most headaches can be treated with over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Parents should seek [medical attention](#) if their child has a headache related to injury.

Medical attention is also needed if a child complaining of headache has a fever and stiff neck, or if vision is affected, the headache doesn't

go away or if it causes the child to miss school or other activities, she added.

When dealing with any type of illness, "parents need to be able to quickly assess whether their child is well enough for school, should stay home or needs to see a physician," Caudle said.

When children have a cold, it's generally best for them to rest, she suggested. Coughing, sneezing, runny nose, sinus pressure, mild sore throat and body aches not only make it hard to concentrate in the classroom, but a child may also spread the cold virus to others.

Kids who have a fever should definitely stay home, Caudle said. She advises parents to give child-strength OTC medications and to call a doctor if symptoms worsen or fail to improve. It's also time to call a doctor when an already high fever rises or continues for more than 24 hours.

If you suspect your child has pink eye (conjunctivitis), which is easily spread, keep him or her home. Call your doctor for treatment, typically antibiotic eye drops. The doctor will let you know when your child can return to school.

Children who vomit or have diarrhea should not go to [school](#). They can become dehydrated quickly, so discuss symptoms with your doctor. Gradually introduce clear liquids and bland foods. It's especially important to contact your doctor if vomiting or diarrhea persists for 24 hours, if the child has a fever, or there is blood in the vomit or stool, Caudle said.

"When in doubt about the seriousness of your child's illness, or if your child has underlying illnesses that make them particularly susceptible to the conditions above, always err on the side of caution and contact your child's physician for advice," Caudle said.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics explains how to [prevent the spread of illness in child care and school](#).

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APA citation: Truth or fib? When kids say they're too sick for school (2016, August 22) retrieved 18 October 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-08-truth-fib-kids-theyre-sick.html>

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