

Poll: Parents struggle with when to keep kids home sick from school

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Symptoms that keep kids home from school

*Percent of parents who are NOT LIKELY
to send child to school with symptoms*

Diarrhea	80%	Red watery eyes, no fever	16%
Threw up once, no other symptoms	58%	Runny nose, dry cough, no fever	12%
Slight fever, acting normal	49%		



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2017

What parents say are the symptoms that are most likely to warrant a sick day.
Credit: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll

It can be a nerve-wracking, game time decision for parents: whether their sick child should stay home from school.

But opinions among parents differ when it comes to how sick is too sick, or the importance of sick day consequences such as parents missing work or kids missing tests, according to a new national poll from the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

Seventy-five percent of parents report at least one sick day for their child in the past year. The top factors in parents' decision to keep a child home included concern that the illness would get worse or spread to classmates, according to today's nationally representative poll report.

Parents of younger children (ages 6 to 9) most frequently rate health related concerns as very important considerations in calling a sick day while two in five parents of high schoolers place similar value on missing tests or falling behind in class work.

Symptoms also make a difference. Most parents (80 percent) are not likely to send a child to school with diarrhea, but have less agreement about vomiting (58 percent) or a slight fever but acting normally (49 percent). Few parents say they are not likely to send a child with red watery eyes but no fever (16 percent), or a runny nose, dry cough and no fever (12 percent).

"Parents often have to make a judgment call about whether their child's sickness warrants staying home," says lead author and Mott poll co-director Gary Freed, M.D., M.P.H. "We found that the major considerations were whether attending school could negatively impact a child's health or the health of classmates."

Freed says parents may recognize that certain symptoms like diarrhea

and vomiting would significantly disrupt a child's school day. But most parents did not view familiar symptoms, such as a runny nose or [dry cough](#) without a fever, as serious enough to miss school.

"It can be difficult to predict if a child will feel worse after going to school or how long symptoms of minor illnesses will last, so parents are often basing decisions on their best guess," Freed says.

Logistics also influence the decision to keep a child home from school. Eleven percent of parents cite not wanting to miss work as very important while 18 percent say not being able to find someone to stay home with their sick child is a very important factor. This is less of an issue as children get older, with 32 percent of parents allowing older children to stay home alone when sick.

Only 6 percent of parents say that missing after-school activities is very important.

The report was based on responses from 1,442 [parents](#) who had at least one child age 6-18 years.

What parents should know

Off to school or stay home? Doctors offer guidelines to consider if your child is sick.

- A phone call or visit to the child's health care provider can help you know whether the child has a serious illness, but may not clarify how long symptoms will last.
- Does your child have a [runny nose](#) but is in good spirits, playing and eating? Send them to school with extra tissues. But if symptoms are accompanied by decreased appetite, lethargy, mood change or breathing difficulty, call the child's health care

provider.

- A spike in temperature does not always mean something serious. If children are attentive and playing, a school day likely won't hurt. But if the fever persists more than three days or comes with other symptoms (like listlessness or vomiting), keep them home, and consider calling their [health care](#) provider.
- The cause of diarrhea and vomiting could range from a virus to food poisoning. If symptoms will disrupt the school day, are accompanied by pain or fever or if the child is too young to manage [symptoms](#) (e.g. making trips to the bathroom, being conscious of handwashing) keep your child home.

More information: Read the full report: mottnpch.org/reports-surveys/p...ick-kids-home-school

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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