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When Should Your Child Stay Home from School Due to a Cold?

-When is it appropriate for parents to let their child stay home from school?

Going to school can be very stressful for children. When children aren't feeling well, the stress of the school day can be too much. When children are ill, they are more tired, cranky and tend not to eat or drink. This sets them up to get further dehydrated and ill. To keep an illness from progressing, a day at home may be the first step. At home, caregivers can encourage a child to eat nourishing food like chicken soup, drink hydrating fluids such as water and rest.

-Is it better for your child to stay home so you don't get other children sick?

Keeping your child home from school is important for both your child's health as well as the health of their classmates and teachers. Children will exchange germs and get ill more frequently compared to adults. Many of the viruses that cause colds are airborne. Teach your children to sneeze into the crook of their arms and to cover their mouths when coughing. Then encourage them to wash their hands after coughing, blowing their noses and before eating. Also coughing onto toys can contaminate them and make others fall sick. Make sure your teacher is aware of your child's illness so hygiene precautions can be implemented at school.

-What signs or symptoms should a child have in order to be absent?

Some general rules of thumb to skip school include a fever over 101 degrees Fahrenheit, a severe cough, and nausea, vomiting and wheezing. These same symptoms also merit calling your pediatrician and arranging for a trip to their office. Other important signs of illness are rash and general malaise.

-Which cold remedy works the best?

Most physicians and the FDA no longer recommend cough and cold medicines for children especially younger than age 2. For children older than 2, be wary of overdosing a child but using more than one remedy with the same ingredient. Children's Tylenol, Advil or Motrin can help with headache and low-grade fever. Always follow the directions on the label and from your physician. Cold-EEZE zinc lozenges or oral spray are an effective way to decrease the duration of a cold. Studies from Dartmouth and the Cleveland Clinic have shown a decrease by 42% of a cold's duration. Zinc gluconate works best when started on the first day of symptoms so always keep some handy. Clean humidifiers also go a long way in keeping your child comfortable with their nasal symptoms. Keep your child well-hydrated. Unfortunately, the studies have fallen short in proving the efficacy of Vitamin C.

-Is there a way parents can prevent their children from getting sick?

Teaching your child good hygiene is the best prevention for staying healthy. Washing hands before eating or touching the eyes, nose and mouth is essential. A well-balanced diet, good hydration and rest are also important.

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