

Children's infectious diseases

For more information contact your local health unit, community health centre, pharmacist or doctor

Chickenpox

Time from exposure to illness
2 to 3 weeks.

Symptoms

Slight fever, runny nose, and a rash that begins as raised pink spots that blister and scab. Can be more severe in pregnant women and newborns.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 5 days after the rash first appears and until the blisters have all scabbed over.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation is available for children at 18 months of age. It is recommended for people over 12 years who are not immune.

Conjunctivitis

Time from exposure to illness
1-3 days.

Symptoms

The eye feels scratchy, is red and may water. Lids may stick together on waking.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, while there is discharge from the eye.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; avoid sharing towels. Antibiotics may be needed.

Gastroenteritis

Time from exposure to illness
Depends on the cause: several hours to several days.

Symptoms

A combination of frequent loose or watery stools, vomiting, fever, stomach cramps, headaches.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, at least for 24 hours after diarrhoea stops.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing with soap and water after using the toilet or handling nappies and before touching food.

German measles (Rubella)

Time from exposure to illness
2 to 3 weeks.

Symptoms

Often mild or no symptoms, mild fever, runny nose, swollen nodes, pink blotchy rash that lasts a short time. Can cause birth defects if pregnant women are infected.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for at least 4 days after the rash appears.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years of age.

Glandular fever

Time from exposure to illness
4 to 6 weeks.

Symptoms

Fever, headache, sore throat, tiredness, swollen nodes.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No, unless sick.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing. Avoid sharing drinks, food and utensils and kissing.

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Hand, foot and mouth disease

Time from exposure to illness

3 to 7 days.

Symptoms

Mild illness, perhaps with a fever, blisters around the mouth, on the hands and feet, and perhaps the nappy area.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the blisters have dried.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing especially after wiping noses, using the toilet and changing nappies.

Head lice

Time from infestation to eggs hatching

Usually 5 to 7 days.

Symptoms

Itchy scalp, white specks stuck near the base of the hairs, lice may be found on the scalp.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No, as long as head lice treatment is ongoing.

How can I help prevent spread?

Family, friends and classroom contacts should be examined and treated if infested.

Hepatitis A

Time from exposure to illness

About 2 to 6 weeks.

Symptoms

Often none in small children; sudden fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), dark urine, pale stools.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 2 weeks after first symptoms or 1 week after onset of jaundice.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; close contacts may need to have an injection of immunoglobulin; immunisation recommended for some people.

Impetigo (school sores)

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms

Small red spots change into blisters that fill with pus and become crusted; usually on the face, hands or scalp.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until treatment starts. Sores should be covered with a watertight dressing

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing.

Influenza

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms

Sudden onset of fever, runny nose, sore throat, cough, muscle and headaches.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until they feel better.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation is especially recommended for the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions.

Measles

Time from exposure to illness:

About 10 to 12 days until first symptoms, and 14 days until the rash develops.

Symptoms

Fever, tiredness, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes for a few days followed by a red blotchy rash that starts on the face and spreads down the body and lasts 4 to 7 days.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for at least 4 days after the rash appears.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years. Contacts who are not immune may be excluded from school for 14 days.

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Meningococcal disease

Time from exposure to illness

2 to 10 days.

Symptoms

Sudden onset of fever and a combination of headache, neck stiffness, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness or rash.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Seek medical help immediately. Patient will need hospital treatment.

How can I help prevent spread?

Close contacts may need to take a special antibiotic and should see their doctor urgently if symptoms develop. A vaccination against one strain of meningococcal disease is given to all children at 12 months of age.

Mumps

Time from exposure to illness

14 to 25 days.

Symptoms

Fever, swollen and tender glands around the jaw.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, for 9 days after onset of swelling.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation (MMR) at 12 months and 4 years of age.

Ringworm

Time from exposure to illness

Varies (may be several days).

Symptoms

Small scaly patch on the skin surrounded by a pink ring.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the day after treatment has begun.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing.

Scabies

Time from exposure to illness

New infections: 2 to 6 weeks

Reinfections: 1 to 4 days.

Symptoms

Itchy skin, worse at night. Worse around wrists, armpits, buttocks, groin and between fingers and toes.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the day after treatment has begun.

How can I help prevent spread?

Close contacts should be examined for infestation and treated if necessary. Wash linen, towels and clothing worn in the past 2 days in hot water and detergent.

Scarlet fever

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 3 days.

Symptoms

Sudden onset sore throat, high fever and vomiting, followed by a rash in 12 to 36 hours.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until at least 24 hours of treatment has begun and the child is feeling better.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing. Sick contacts should see their doctor.

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Slapped cheek (Erytherma infectiosum, Fifth disease, Parvovirus B19)

Time from exposure to illness

1 to 2 weeks.

Symptoms

Mild illness: fever, red cheeks, itchy lace-like rash and possible cough, sore throat or runny nose. If you are pregnant when your child has this disease see your doctor immediately because it could affect your unborn baby.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No, this disease is most infectious before the rash appears.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing; avoid sharing drinks.

Whooping Cough (pertussis)

Time from exposure to illness

7 to 20 days.

Symptoms

Starts with runny nose, followed by persistent cough that comes in bouts. Bouts may be followed by vomiting and a whooping sound as the child gasps for air.

Do I need to keep my child home?

Yes, until the child has taken the first 5 days of a special antibiotic.

How can I help prevent spread?

Immunisation at 2,4,6 months, 4 years and in high school. A special antibiotic can be given for the patient and close contacts. Unimmunised contacts may be excluded from child care unless they take a special antibiotic.

Worms

Time from exposure to illness:

Several weeks.

Symptoms

Itchy bottom.

Do I need to keep my child home?

No.

How can I help prevent spread?

Careful hand washing. Whole household should be treated. Wash linen, towels and clothing worn in the past 2 days in hot water and detergent.