



## Is It Still Contagious? When Your Child Can Return to School or Childcare

### General Return Rule

Your child can usually return when they:

- Fever-free for **24 hours** (without fever-reducing medicine)
- Feeling better and acting like themselves
- Drinking fluids well
- Able to participate in normal activities

When in doubt, check with your provider.

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### Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis)

Most cases are viral. The American Academy of Pediatrics no longer recommends exclusion from school for pinkeye **if there is no fever or behavior change**.

**Spread:** Highly contagious (hands, surfaces, secretions)

#### Return when:

- No fever
- Child feels well enough to participate

Antibiotics are **not always needed**. School policies may vary.

#### Reduce spread:

Handwashing, avoid touching eyes, no sharing towels/pillows, clean surfaces.

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### Strep Throat

Bacterial infection requiring antibiotics.

**Symptoms:** Sudden sore throat, fever, swollen glands, stomach pain, no cough

**Incubation:** 2–5 days

**Spread:** Droplets, saliva

#### Return when:

- On antibiotics for **at least 12 hours**
- Fever-free (without fever-reducing medicine)
- Feeling better

👉 Finish the full 10-day antibiotic course.

(For sore throats that test negative for strep, follow same guidance as above)



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## RSV

Common respiratory virus. Often worse on days 3–5.

**Spread:** Respiratory droplets + surfaces

**Incubation:** 2–8 days (usually 4–6)

**Most contagious:** First week (sometimes longer)

**Return when:**

- Fever-free 24h (without fever-reducing medicine)
- Breathing comfortably
- Hydrated and improving

**Reduce spread:** Handwashing, clean surfaces, cover coughs

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## Respiratory Viruses: Influenza (Flu A & B), COVID-19, “common cold”

Most common October–March.

**Incubation:** 1–4 days

**Most contagious:** First few days (usually about a week total). Some viruses can spread before symptoms begin.

**Spread:** Droplets, air particles, surfaces

**Return when:**

- Fever-free 24h (without fever-reducing medicine)
- Feeling better and well enough to participate
- Staying well hydrated
- For COVID specifically, follow current local school or public health guidance if additional precautions are required.

 Flu vaccine reduces severity and duration.

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## Croup

Barky cough caused by viral upper airway swelling.

**Incubation:** 2–7 days

**Spread:** Respiratory droplets

**Return when:**

- Fever-free 24h
- Breathing comfortably
- Acting like themselves
- Staying hydrated

## **Norovirus (“Stomach Flu”)**

Sudden vomiting, then diarrhea.

**Incubation:** 1–3 days

**Vomiting:** Often 12–72 hours

**Diarrhea:** May last 7–14 days

**Contagious:** Can spread for weeks; survives on surfaces

**Spread:** Hands, food, diaper changes, contaminated surfaces

### **Return when:**

- No vomiting for 24h
- Fever-free 24h (without fever-reducing medicine)
- Eating and drinking normally
- Diarrhea improving

### **Reduce spread:**

Wash hands with soap and water (not just sanitizer).

Disinfect with bleach-based cleaner.

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## **Vomiting, Diarrhea, or Fever (Any Cause)**

### **Stay home if:**

- Fever over 100.4°F
- Vomiting more than once in 24h
- Frequent loose stools

### **Return when:**

- Fever-free 24h (without fever-reducing medicine)
  - No vomiting for 24h
  - Diarrhea improving
  - Drinking fluids well
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## **Impetigo**

Skin infection caused by strep or staph bacteria.

**Spread:** Direct skin contact or touching sores

### **Return when:**

- On antibiotics (may be topical or oral) for **at least 12 hours**
- Sores are covered
- Child feels well

## Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease

Caused by coxsackie virus.

**Incubation:** 2–7 days

**Spread:** Respiratory droplets, stool, contact with blister fluid

**Note:** Virus can shed in stool for weeks

### Return when:

- Fever-free 24h (without fever-reducing medicine)
  - Feeling better
  - It's okay if your child still has spots or blisters — these can take time to fade and don't necessarily mean they're still contagious. This virus can spread even from children who don't have symptoms, so keeping a child home after they're feeling better doesn't stop the spread.
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## Poison Ivy

Not contagious.

Children can return to school.

(Spread only occurs from leftover plant oil on hands, clothing, shoes, backpacks.)

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## Other fun things: Ringworm, Scabies, Lice & Pinworms

- **Ringworm:** Fungal skin infection (not a worm). Spread through skin-to-skin contact.
- **Scabies:** Tiny mites that cause an itchy rash. Spread through skin-to-skin contact.
- **Lice:** Spread through close head contact, shared hats, and shared brushes.
- **Pinworms:** Common intestinal parasite causing nighttime itching. Spread hand-to-mouth after scratching.

### Return when:

- After starting treatment (Household members usually need treatment as well for scabies and pinworms )
  - Area can be covered (ringworm only)
  - Child feels well
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## ♥ Final Reminder

By the time many viral symptoms appear, children have already been contagious for several days. Keeping them home until they're improving and fever-free helps protect others — and helps them recover faster. If you're unsure, we can help! **More information about each illness can be found on our [PAA Handout Page](#).**

