

## **I Don't Feel Good**

### **When to keep your child home from school**

There comes a time — usually it's about 6:30 a.m. — when you have to make the call: Is my child really too sick to go to school?

Sometimes the decision is clear-cut. High fever or vomiting come to mind. But that's not why you're reading this story. It's the borderline cases that give parents trouble.

Dr. Casey Drake, a pediatrician on the medical staff at Children's Medical Center Dallas, offers the following advice on deciding when to keep a child home:

#### **Sniffles and coughs**

Pediatricians agree that children can attend school with the sniffles as long as they feel all right otherwise. But keep your child home if she has a heavy cough accompanied by a steady stream of mucus. Also keep your child home if the cough is accompanied by rapid or labored breathing.

#### **Stomachaches**

An upset stomach — often caused by anxiety — is the most common complaint among children. Use the "jump test" to make a preliminary evaluation, says Dr. Drake. "Abdominal pain is worrisome and needs to be followed to make sure it isn't getting worse. But, if your child can jump, she is probably OK to go to school."

If the stomach pain is accompanied by diarrhea or fever, Dr. Drake suggests keeping your child home. If the pain seems severe, consult your physician.

#### **Rashes**

It's important to determine the source of a rash. If it's poison ivy, for example, your child can go to school as long as the rash is being properly treated. But an unexplained rash may be the first symptom of contagious illnesses, such as measles or chickenpox.

If the rash is accompanied by other symptoms, such as fever, crankiness, lethargy, unusual crying or general discomfort, keep your child home and describe these symptoms to your doctor.

#### **Fevers**

Readings below 100 degrees are generally not cause for concern, says Dr. Drake. If a fever above 100 degrees is combined with a sore throat or rash, this could indicate a more serious illness. Keep your child home and then describe the symptoms to your doctor. As a general rule, children should be free of fever for 24 hours before returning to school.