

Minor illness and school attendance: A guide for parents and carers

Improving pupil attendance in Islington



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Contents

Introduction	3
When should I keep my child off school?	3
How can you help?	3
Medical appointments	4
Medicines in school	4
Punctuality	4
Health tips	4
Other health concerns	5
• Long term illness	5
• Longer term absence.....	5
• Parent/sibling unwell.....	5
Minor illnesses.....	6
Raised temperature (fever).....	6
Rashes.....	6
Colds and coughs.....	6
Asthma.....	7
Viral-induced wheeze.....	7
Toothache.....	8
Ear infections and ear ache	8
Headache.....	8
Tummy ache	8
Head lice	8
Vomiting and diarrhoea	9
Hand washing.....	9
Table of common illnesses: do children need to stay off school?	10
Useful contact details.....	11

Introduction

As a parent, it can be difficult to decide whether or not your child is well enough to go to school.

To help avoid unnecessary school absences, Islington School Nursing has produced this leaflet as a general guide to help you decide whether your child is well enough to attend school when they have a minor illness. Missing lessons is upsetting for children and disruptive for the whole class and there is good evidence that children achieve better at school when they have good school attendance rates.

Parents have a duty to ensure their child is not absent where this can be avoided. Schools may not authorise your child's absence for a minor illness if they thought it was not necessary.

When should I keep my child off school?

Your child should only be kept away from school due to illness if they:

1. Have an infectious illness which could spread to other people
2. Need care during school hours that cannot be carried out in school
3. Are so unwell that they are not able to cope with lessons

The NHS website has useful advice here:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school

If you are not sure, check the guidance in this leaflet. If you are still unsure, contact:

- Your school
- The school nurse
- A pharmacist or GP

How can you help?

Please make sure that the telephone contact details the school has are up to date. It is important that the school is able to make contact with you during the day if your child is not well enough to stay in school.

If you do need to keep your child off school, you should always contact the school in the morning to let them know why your child will not be coming to school.

Many children experience common illnesses from time to time. Most of these illnesses do not need a prescription or a visit to your doctor and do not need time away from school. Often treating your child's illness yourself, or with advice and medicines from your pharmacist, can be the quickest and easiest way to deal with it.

Please remember that early morning aches and pains often pass, so don't keep your child at home 'just in case' when they could be learning in class. When you send your child to school with minor aches or pains, tell the school staff and they will phone you if your child continues to have symptoms.

Medical appointments

Please arrange doctors', dentists' and opticians' appointments outside school hours when possible. If this is not possible, your child should attend school for the rest of the day.

Medicines in school

Your child does not need to be kept at home just because they are taking medicines. If your child needs to take medicines during the school day, please talk to the school staff about this.

Punctuality

Establishing good habits is important. Ensure that your child goes to bed early, because a lack of sleep will affect their ability to function in the morning, which may lead to lateness.

Health tips

To ensure that your child is happy, healthy and able to participate fully in school activities, your child should:

- Be registered with a GP and a dentist
- Have regular checks with their dentist and optician
- Have all the childhood immunisations recommended by the Department of Health
- Have a healthy diet and exercise
- Get enough sleep by going to bed on time

Speak to school staff or the school nurse if you have any concerns about your child.

Other health concerns

Long term illness

If your child has a long term illness, you should discuss this with your doctor and the school. Usually it is possible to arrange medication so that it is not taken during school hours. School staff may need to be made aware of the illness so that if it causes problems while your child is at school, they know how to help.

Longer term absence

If there are concerns about your child's repeated absence from school, the school will refer your child to the school nurse and/or may ask you to present medical evidence giving the reason for the absences. A letter from a medical professional, such as a GP or from a hospital, is needed when:

- Your child has any condition requiring medical care
- Your child returns to school with a cast, crutches, stitches etc.
- Your child needs restricted PE lessons or playtime activities for more than three days in a row

If your child has seen their GP or been to hospital, please follow the recommendations of the doctor on when your child can return to school.

If your child is absent for a long term medical condition, consideration may be given for alternative education provision, including home tuition.

When a parent or sibling is ill

You should make other arrangements to get any well children to school. Family or sibling illness is not considered a good enough reason for children to be absent from school.

Developing good family or parent networks can be helpful, **as schools will not usually authorise absence due to parental or sibling illness.**

Please discuss any difficulties with the school, as they may be able to offer support. Any continued absence may be referred to the local authority for consideration.

Minor illnesses

Raised temperature (fever)

If your child is shivery or feels hot, they may have a raised temperature. This may be due to a variety of reasons. If your child has a raised temperature (over 38°C), they should not be in school. It is important to measure the temperature accurately with a digital thermometer, which you can buy from a supermarket or pharmacy. Please follow the instructions for use carefully. Your child should be able to return to school once they feel and look better.

For further information please visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children

Rashes

A rash could be one of the first signs of many childhood illnesses, such as chickenpox or measles. The rash or 'spots' may cover the entire body or may only appear in one area.

If your child has an unexplained rash, please seek medical advice. Do not send a child to school with an unexplained rash that may be infectious, until you have consulted your doctor or they are better.

If the rash has been diagnosed as infectious, please see the table in this booklet (page 10) for guidance on whether your child should be attending school.

For further information please visit:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/rashes-babies-and-children

Colds and coughs

Children can attend school with a mild cold and cough. If your child has asthma, remember they may need their reliever inhaler more often (see page 7). They should have a spare inhaler and spacer which they can use when they are at school.

Occasionally coughs can be persistent and last for weeks. Children with bad or long-lasting coughs need to see their GP. Once treated, or when the cough is improving and the child is feeling better, they need to return to school.

Asthma

Asthma is a long-term condition that affects the lungs, and can cause cough, wheeze, difficulty breathing or asthma attacks which make it hard to breathe.

If your child has asthma, you must ensure that you give the school a spare reliever (usually blue) inhaler and a spacer to be used in school for your child, and their up-to-date asthma action plan.

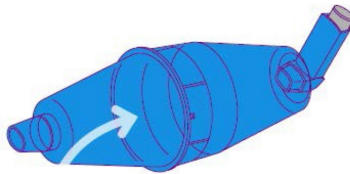
Staff at school will be able to recognise worsening asthma symptoms and will know what to do in the event of an attack, particularly staff supervising sport or PE. Your child's school should have an asthma policy and an asthma register. Most schools in Islington have a designated asthma lead and are Asthma Friendly Schools.

For more information on asthma in schools, please use the following links: www.asthma.org.uk and www.healthy london.org/resource/london-asthma-toolkit/schools

Viral-induced wheeze

Viral-induced wheeze is similar to asthma and a third of children will grow out of viral-induced wheeze by the time they reach Year 1 of primary school. Viral-induced wheeze is triggered by virus infections, and unlike in asthma, children do not have symptoms all year round.

If your child has viral-induced wheeze, you must ensure that you give the school a spare reliever (usually blue) inhaler and a spacer to be used in school for your child, and their up-to-date wheeze action plan.



Using a **spacer** with an **inhaler** makes it **more effective**

Find out more about asthma inhalers at www.asthma.org.uk/advice/inhalers-medicines-treatments

It is important for children with wheeze to see a health professional, such as a GP, at least every 12 months to agree your child's wheeze action plan and to review their symptoms, medication and inhaler/spacer technique. A letter from a GP will be requested by school as evidence if a child no longer needs a reliever inhaler and spacer in school.

There is useful information about asthma in school and using inhaler/spacers in this booklet: www.asthma.org.uk/globalassets/health-advice/resources/children/asthma-and-my-child-booklet.pdf

Toothache

If your child has a toothache for longer than two days, it is recommended that they see a dentist.

Ear infections and ear ache

Ear infections are very common, particularly in children. You don't always need to see a GP for an ear infection as they often get better on their own. If your child has a raised temperature (over 38°C), they will need to stay off school until this improves. Your child may also need pain relief if they are experiencing an ear ache.

If there is no improvement in your child after three days, please seek medical advice from a health professional.

For further information, visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/earache

Headache

If the only complaint is a slight headache, your child will not usually need to be kept at home. If a headache is persistent and not responding to pain relief, contact your GP.

Tummy ache

If your child complains of mild tummy ache and has no other symptoms, they should go to school. If the tummy ache is associated with vomiting/diarrhoea then your child must stay off school until the symptoms have stopped for two days (see page 9).

If your child complains of repeated mild tummy ache, headache or other symptoms and does not want to attend school, this could be due to your child being unhappy at school, experiencing bullying or finding school work difficult. Speak to your child, the teacher or school nurse to discuss this and find ways of dealing with it.

Head lice

Head lice and nits are very common in young children. They don't have anything to do with dirty hair and are usually picked up from head-to-head contact. Your child having head lice does not require them to be absent from school.

Head lice and nits can be removed by wet combing. This method should be tried first. You can buy a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb) online or from pharmacies. There will be instructions on the pack, but typically you:

- Use the comb on wet or dry hair, although it usually works best on wet hair with conditioner
- Comb the whole head of hair, from the roots to the ends
- Repeat every few days for two weeks

It usually takes about 10 minutes to comb short hair and 20 to 30 minutes for long, frizzy or curly hair.

If this treatment is unsuccessful or your child has persistent episodes of head lice, please visit your pharmacist for further advice.

For further information, visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits

Vomiting and diarrhoea

If a child has vomiting or has diarrhoea, keep them off school. You can usually treat your child at home. The most important thing is to have plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

Your child is most infectious from when the symptoms start until two days after they've stopped. Keep them off school until the symptoms have stopped for two days.

Do:

- Wash your hands with soap and hot water frequently and ensure your child does this too
- Always wash their hands after going to the toilet and before preparing or eating food
- Wash dirty clothes and bedding separately on a hot wash
- Clean toilet seats, flush handles, taps, surfaces and door handles every day

Don't:

- Prepare food for other people, if possible
- Share towels, flannels, cutlery or utensils
- Use a swimming pool until two weeks after the symptoms stop

If there is no improvement or if you are worried about your child, please contact NHS 111 or your child's GP. For further information please visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/diarrhoea-and-vomiting

Hand washing

Washing your hands properly removes dirt, viruses and bacteria to stop them spreading to other people and objects which can spread illnesses such as food poisoning, flu or diarrhoea. It is important to teach your children effective hand washing to reduce the spread of germs which can lead to increased school absence.

When to wash your hands

- After using the toilet
- After changing nappies or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- Before during and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching rubbish

If you need further information on effective hand washing, please visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands

The following table provides guidance on some common childhood illnesses, and whether children need to stay off school*:

Illness	Recommendations
Chicken pox and shingles	Keep off school for five days from start of rash and until all the spots have crusted over
Cold sores	No need to be off school
Conjunctivitis	No need to be off school
Diarrhoea and vomiting	Keep off school until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting
Flu (influenza)	Children should return to school as soon as they have recovered
Glandular fever	No need to be off school
Hand, foot and mouth disease	It is not usually necessary to keep off school
Head lice (nits)	No need to be off school
Impetigo	Keep off school until lesions (spots) are crusted or healed or 48 hours after starting antibiotic treatment, whichever is shorter
Measles	Keep off school for four days from start of rash and until recovered
Molluscum contagiosum	No need to be off school
Mumps	Keep off school for five days from start of swollen glands
Ringworm	It is not usually necessary to keep off school
Rubella (German measles)	Keep off school for four days from start of rash
Scabies	Children can return to school after first treatment
Scarlet fever	Keep off school for 24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment
Slapped cheek / Fifth disease / Parvovirus B19	No need to be off school once rash has developed
Threadworms	No need to be off school
Warts and verrucae	No need to be off school
Whooping cough (pertussis)	Keep off school for two days after starting antibiotic treatment or 21 days from start of cough if no antibiotic treatment has been given

* From Guidance on Health protection in schools and other childcare facilities (PHE 2018)

Contact details

School Nursing Service

For enquiries for school nurses and their teams, please contact:

Highbury Grange Health Centre

1-5 Highbury Grange

London Borough of Islington, N5 2QB

Tel: 020 3316 8021

Email: whh-tr.islingtonschoolnursing@nhs.net

Access and Engagement Service

For any attendance and punctuality enquiries, please contact:

Tel: 020 7527 3747

Email: pupilservices@islington.gov.uk

Families First

Families First is available for practical family support to improve school attendance.

For further enquiries please contact:

Tel: 020 7257 4343

Other useful contact details and information

NHS 111 (Free phone line available 24 hours for urgent health advice)

Tel: 111 (free)

NHS information about health and medicines: www.nhs.uk

