

## What is a communicable disease?

Communicable diseases are infections that spread through the air, through food, by touch or bodily fluids. Some illnesses have mild symptoms while others may be more severe and even life-threatening. Children are exposed to a variety of communicable diseases in school and child care settings during normal activities. It is important to take appropriate actions to control the spread of these infections, and a crucial part of this is keeping your child home when they are sick.

## When does my child need to stay home from school or child care?

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell how sick a child is. Here are a few guidelines to help you make the best decision for the health and safety of your child and those around them. Stay home and consider contacting your healthcare provider if your child is experiencing any of the following:

- Fever (temperature over 100.4° F)
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Persistent coughing or difficulty breathing
- Sore throat with difficulty swallowing
- Unidentified or spreading rash
- Mouth or skin sores that are weeping fluid
- Extreme fatigue or lethargy
- Severe pain or severe headache

Continue to monitor your child’s symptoms and **call 9-1-1** for any illness that is life-threatening or needs to be treated right away. (See [Treating Childhood Emergencies and Illnesses](#) for more information.)

## When can my child return to school or child care?

Children need to be free from fever, diarrhea and vomiting for at least **24 hours** (without the use of medication) before they are cleared to return to school or child care. They need to show significant improvement in symptoms with a return to normal activity level. There are some *reportable conditions* that require additional measures before returning to school, which may include negative test results, antibiotics, other treatments, or isolation periods. During outbreaks of communicable diseases, there may be further steps to control the spread of illness in school and child care settings. ([WAC 246-110](#))

## How can we prevent the spread of communicable diseases?



### Stay Home

Getting rest and fluids will help your child recover and prevent the spread of contagious illnesses.



### Childhood Vaccines

Vaccines have eliminated or greatly reduced many childhood diseases. Make sure your child is up to date on *immunizations*.



### Respiratory Etiquette

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Consider wearing a mask while you are sick.



### Proper Handwashing

Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap, especially after using the toilet or changing diapers, and before preparing food or eating.

Information adapted from [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [OSPI Infectious Disease Control Guide](#) and [Seattle Children’s Hospital](#).

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