



San Diego Unified School District

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Answering Parents' Questions About Colds, Flu, and When to Keep a Child Home

Parent:

What is the difference between a “cold” and the “flu?”

Answer:

Both colds and flu are caused by viruses, they affect the nose and throat and are more common in winter – even in warm climates like southern California.

Flu is caused by one of the influenza viruses. Flu is often more severe than a cold and it is more likely to come with headache, fever, chills, muscle aches, and “just feeling terrible all over.” It is often not possible to recognize the difference between a bad cold and the flu, especially in young children.

The flu is serious for children with lung disease and abnormal immune systems.

Parent:

Can I protect my child from getting a cold or the flu?

Answer:

On average a young child will get seven colds per year and an adult two colds per year. There is no reasonable way to keep from getting at least some of these infections. Preventative measures you can do are:

- Wash hands after touching others and after touching objects that others handle.
- Because no one can wash their hands each time they have contact with someone else, keep your fingers away from your nose and eyes. This is the most common way cold viruses are transferred into your body.
- Those with colds should cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing and coughing, throw the tissue away and then wash their hands.

Children with asthma, certain heart problems, certain immune system problems, and other conditions should get the flu vaccine. If your child has any of these, or if you want the vaccine regardless, contact your child's doctor. The flu shot only works on some types of flu and unlike some other vaccines it is protective for only a few months.

Parent:

If my child has a cold, should I keep him/her at home?

Answer:

Please send your child to school unless your child has a fever or feels too ill (see next question). The school is able to teach your child, even when he or she is feeling less than perfect because of a cold. Childhood colds often last 10 days to 2 weeks. Children would miss too much school if cold symptoms kept them at home.

One would think keeping your child home would protect classmates from getting colds, but doctors have discovered that classmates have the same chances of catching a cold whether or not your child is there.

Parent:

Is there ever a reason to keep a child with a cold or flu at home?

Answer:

It would be best to keep your child out of school if he/she exhibits these signs:

1. A temperature greater than 100.5° (as taken by mouth).
- or -
2. If your child is feeling too ill to pay attention in class. Sometimes this happens during that first day or two of a bad cold and the flu.

Parent:

Do I need to take my child to a doctor when my child has a cold or flu?

Answer:

Talk to or visit your doctor if you are very concerned if your child has unusually severe cold symptoms, a high fever, ear pain, a cough that gets worse while the other cold symptoms are improving, or a flare-up of asthma.

When a student's illness keeps the child from attending school for many days, the school may ask the parent to have their child examined by a doctor and to bring a doctor's note to school. A medical explanation for absenteeism helps the school know whether to make a special arrangement for a child's education or to wait for the medical problem to go away.

Parent:

Is there anything else I should remember?

Answer:

1. Always remember to tell someone at school where you can be reached during the school day, in case the school is trying to reach you.
2. Remember that your school nurse can answer many of your questions, check your child and arrange to give any prescribed medications, including prescribed asthma treatments. Asthma often gets worse when a child has a cold and your school nurse can help make sure that asthma does not impede your child's education.