

SEND TO SCHOOL OR KEEP AT HOME?

advice and guidance for parents
on common illnesses in
children and young adults



compiled by Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys

**The information in this booklet is intended only as a guide for parents
not as a diagnostic tool.**

**You should always consult your GP if you are concerned about your child's
health or believe that he may have a communicable disease or illness.**

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*Please remember to telephone the school on
01227 463567
if your son is absent due to illness.*

Chickenpox & Shingles

What is it?

Chickenpox is a common infectious disease. It is caused by a virus called varicella zoster and is spread by sneezing and coughing or direct contact with broken chickenpox blisters. It is much more severe in adults than in children and can be a particular problem in pregnancy. Shingles (also known as herpes zoster) is a reactivation of the virus and will only develop in a person who has previously had chickenpox.

Chickenpox is like a mild

What are the Symptoms?

case of flu with an itchy rash. The rash is the most noticeable feature and starts out as crops of raised red spots. These develop into small blisters which eventually scab over in 3-4 days. Chickenpox is mainly a disease of children and is usually, but not always, a mild illness. Shingles consists of a blistering and painful rash along the pathway of a single nerve, usually limited to one side of the body. It is most common in older adults but children who are immunosuppressed or are being treated for

cancer can develop shingles.

Chickenpox is highly infectious and is usually

How is it spread?

spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. The incubation period is two to three weeks. Children with chickenpox can pass it to others from 1-2 days before the rash appears until 5 days after the rash has started. A child who has had chickenpox will be immune for life. Because it is the reactivation of a virus, you cannot catch shingles. However, fluid from the blisters can spread the virus to other people, who will develop chickenpox if they have never had it before. The rash should be covered with a dry dressing until the blisters have dried up.

Chickenpox is highly infectious and it is very difficult to prevent it spreading from person to person. Getting the child

How can it be prevented?

to cough into a tissue and keeping them away from susceptible people should help prevent transmission of Chickenpox. Shingles itself cannot be prevented but children who are immunosuppressed or are being treated for cancer and who have not had chickenpox, should not be allowed to contact cases of shingles, and they should see their GP to ask about protection.

Children with chickenpox should stay away from school for five days from the first appearance of the rash. If your child has

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chickenpox, please let the school know in case other children, parents or teachers need to avoid infection for medical reasons. If you are pregnant and have been in contact with a child with chickenpox and you have never had chickenpox, please see your GP as soon as possible.

Cold Sores (Herpes simplex)

What is it?

Cold sores are caused by infection with the herpes simplex virus, commonly presenting as blisters in the nose or mouth.

What are the Symptoms?

It often starts with symptoms of tingling in an area of nose or mouth followed by the appearance of a blister. The blister crusts and heals without a scar. Children who are infected for the first time can have more widespread blisters, mouth ulcers and fever which can make them quite ill. Subsequent attacks normally present with cold sores only.

They have a tendency to recur because the cold sore virus does not disappear from the body completely after the infection. The virus remains in an inactive state, and re-activation can be triggered by factors such as stress, illness and sunlight

How is it spread?

Cold sores can spread from person to person. There are two ways of spread. They are usually spread by kissing since the virus is active in the cold sore blister. The virus can also be picked up by touching the sores, and thus spread to others. Children infected for the first time may shed the virus for several weeks. Cold sores are highly

How can it be prevented?

infectious, especially among young children. The most effective method of prevention is to avoid contact with oral secretions and the blisters of an infected person. Hands must be thoroughly washed after touching cold sores. Persons with active cold sores should avoid kissing young children. Some people with frequent recurrences may receive medicines from their GP for prevention.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Persons with cold sores need not be excluded from school.

Conjunctivitis

What is it?

The white of the eye and the inner surfaces of the lids are covered by a transparent membrane called the conjunctiva. Conjunctivitis (also known as red - or pink eye or sticky eye) is a condition that causes the surface of the conjunctiva to become inflamed. This can be caused by a number of bacteria, viruses, allergies or foreign bodies. It is a common condition, particularly in children but is usually a self-limiting disease.

What are the Symptoms?

The usual symptoms are watering of the eye, itching, soreness and redness. This may be followed by a yellowish sticky discharge, which can cause the eyelids to stick together, making them difficult to open. This is especially troublesome in the mornings. The white of the eye may appear pink or red. It can last from 2 days to 2 weeks.

Conjunctivitis is easily spread through contact with the discharges from the infected eye and by

How is it spread?

the coughs and sneezes of people with the infection. Often it is spread by the affected child rubbing their eyes and then touching objects which then become contaminated. This provides an opportunity for the infection to spread to the next child having contact with the object. Conjunctivitis also spreads rapidly within families and where there are poor hygiene measures. Occasionally outbreaks of viral conjunctivitis occur through poorly chlorinated swimming pools - "swimming pool conjunctivitis".

How can it be prevented?

Good standards of personal hygiene prevent spread, particularly regular hand washing. Conjunctivitis caused by bacteria may need to be treated with antibiotic drops or cream. There is no treatment for viral conjunctivitis. Affected children should be discouraged from rubbing their eyes and having close facial contact with other children.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Children whose eyes are sticky or producing pus should stay away from school until the infection has cleared. Children who have 'pink eye', but whose eyes are not producing pus do not need to stay away from school.

Diarrhoea and/or Vomiting

What is it?

Diarrhoea and vomiting can be caused by infective agents (i.e. bacteria and viruses) or by chemicals. It is often difficult to find the cause without carrying out special laboratory tests. Until proven otherwise, all cases of diarrhoea and vomiting should be treated as infectious. Diarrhoea is actually a symptom and not a disease. By diarrhoea we mean the stools are abnormally loose and frequent. The diarrhoea can vary in severity and there may be other symptoms such as fever, vomiting and abdominal pain. This depends upon the underlying cause.

How is it spread?

Germs causing diarrhoea and vomiting pass from the gut of one person to another. The germs are excreted in the stools of people with the illness. If hands are not washed properly, people ill with diarrhoea and/or vomiting can carry the germs on their hands and spread them to other places, for example taps, doors,

food etc. Other people can then pick up the germs on their hands and by putting their fingers in their mouths or by handling food, the germs enter their mouths and they become infected. This is called 'hand to mouth' or 'faecal-oral' spread. Diseases causing diarrhoea and vomiting can sometimes be spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

Good hygiene is the most important way to prevent these diseases. It is necessary to practice good hygiene at all times as diarrhoeal disease can spread rapidly and it is not always easy to identify cases early enough to stop them spreading their illness to others.

How can it be prevented?

Everyone should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after every visit to the toilet and before handling or eating food. Toilet bowls, seats and flush handles along with any other surfaces that may have been touched by contaminated hands (i.e. door handles, taps etc.)

should be disinfected daily. A simple solution of a disinfectant at the correct dilution is all that is required.

If children develop diarrhoea/and or vomiting whilst at school please ensure that they are collected promptly.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

To help prevent the spread of infection within schools, all children with diarrhoea and/or vomiting should stay away from school until 48 hours after the diarrhoea and/or vomiting has stopped.

If your child develops diarrhoea or is sent home with diarrhoea, it is important to tell the school the exact diagnosis once this is known, as it will help in deciding whether any further action is necessary.

Glandular Fever

What is it?

Glandular fever (also called mononucleosis) is a viral illness caused by the Epstein-Barr virus. The usual symptoms are

What are the Symptoms?

tiredness, fever and sore throat and swollen tender glands, particularly in the neck but also in the armpit and groin. Rarely the child may be jaundiced. In young children the disease is generally mild. Once the acute stage has settled, the child can be left with little energy or stamina for several weeks. Glandular fever is spread through saliva by the coughs of people with the

How is it spread?

infection, or by kissing - it is sometimes known as the "kissing disease". Some people with the infection are able to pass it on for many months afterwards.

How can it be prevented?

There is no specific treatment for glandular fever and there is no immunisation against it. Good standards of personal hygiene can help prevent spread.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Children with the illness should stay off school until they feel well again.

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is it?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a mild viral illness caused by the Coxsackie virus that often occurs in epidemics. It is most common in young children but can occur in adults. This infection is completely unrelated to the 'Foot and Mouth' disease in animals – that is caused by a different virus.

What are the Symptoms?

The illness usually starts with a sore throat and then ulcers may develop in the inside of the mouth and blisters on the hands and feet. There may also be a fever. Unlike chickenpox, these blisters are not itchy and usually last between 4 and 10 days. The illness is usually mild and can even occur without any symptoms. Adults and older children may develop a mild form of the illness, but this is rare.

How is it spread?

The illness can be spread by coughs and sneezes or the stools of people with the infection. It can also be passed on during social contact. Symptoms develop between 3 and 5 days after contact with a case. A person is infectious until the blisters fade, though the virus can be excreted for up to 4 weeks after the onset of the illness.

How can it be prevented?

There is no specific treatment for people with the illness and there is no immunisation against it. The best method of prevention is the practice of good personal hygiene:- Everyone should wash their hands after every visit to the toilet and before meals. If it is possible each family member should have his or her own towel.

Whilst the rash is present, swimming in swimming pools should be avoided

Send to School or Keep at Home?

There is no need for any child to stay away from school unless they do not feel well enough to go.

Hepatitis A

What is it?

Hepatitis A is a common infection caused by a virus. It sometimes leads to inflammation of the liver and causes a temporary yellow discoloration of the skin known as jaundice

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus. It is usually passed from person-to-person by "hand-to-mouth" spread as a result of poor hygiene after using the toilet.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Children with hepatitis A infection should stay away from school until 7 days after onset of jaundice or until they are well. Contacts of cases should also stay away from school, and should see the GP if they have symptoms suggestive of the illness.

What are the Symptoms?

Many infections occur without symptoms particularly in children; and many infections are mild and without jaundice. Serious complications are very rare. When symptoms do occur, the onset is usually sudden with fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, feeling sick and abdominal discomfort followed within a few days by jaundice. When a person becomes jaundiced they often develop light coloured stools and dark urine.

How can it be prevented?

Control of infection is difficult because people with Hepatitis A are usually most infectious for a week or two before symptoms appear until a week after the onset of jaundice. Spread of Hepatitis A is reduced by simple hygienic measures particularly thorough hand washing after using the toilet.

An injection of Hepatitis A vaccine given to contacts of cases soon after exposure to the virus will prevent or reduce the severity of the illness in those who have not had the vaccine previously.

Impetigo

What is it?

Impetigo is a common superficial skin infection caused by a bacterium called staphylococcus aureus or staphylococcus pyogenes.

It is contagious and is quite common in young children aged 4 years and under.

What are the Symptoms?

The face is the most commonly affected area but impetigo can occur on any part of the body. At first, small blisters develop which then burst to leave small scabby patches on the skin. These crusted lesions are often yellow in colour, sometimes itch and can spread in small clusters to surrounding areas of skin.

How is it spread?

Impetigo spreads from person to person mainly by direct contact with the infected skin or the hands of people with the infection. On rare occasions it may also be caught from objects that have been used by people with impetigo, such as clothes and towels.

How can it be prevented?

Regular hand washing using soap and water is the most important way in which impetigo can be prevented. This is very important for people who are in close contact with someone with impetigo.

Once impetigo has occurred it needs to be treated with antibiotics which will help the skin to heal and will help prevent other people from catching it. The doctor may provide antibiotic cream, tablets, or, sometimes, both. Children with impetigo also need to be kept especially clean. The infected skin area should be washed with mild soap and water and their hands should be washed

frequently. Their clothes and towels should be changed daily. People with impetigo should have their own towel, which should be kept aside solely for their own use

Send to School or Keep at Home?

All children with impetigo should be kept away from school until their skin has healed or until 48 hours after any antibiotic treatment has begun. Children coming into contact with someone with impetigo do not require any treatment or exclusion from school.

Influenza (Seasonal Flu)

What is it?

Seasonal flu (or influenza) is caused by various strains of the influenza virus.

What are the Symptoms?

The usual symptoms are fever, headache, muscle aches, severe tiredness, sore throat and cough. Sickness and diarrhoea can occur, especially in children. It is sometimes accompanied or followed by chest infections that can be severe, however it is generally a milder illness in children. It often occurs in epidemics, most commonly in the winter.

How is it spread?

Flu is spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. It can spread rapidly within families and schools where there are many people living close together. Flu can be passed on to other people for 3-5 days after symptoms start.

How can it be prevented?

There are no specific treatments but there are many remedies available from pharmacists to ease the symptoms. There are no specific treatments but there are many remedies available from pharmacists to ease the symptoms. **Children should NOT be given any preparations containing aspirin.** If you are in any doubt about the contents of a 'flu' remedy, please check with the pharmacist.

Children affected by influenza should be encouraged to rest and drink plenty of water or other fluids and should be encouraged to cover their mouths when coughing and use paper tissues when sneezing.

Each year vaccines against the likely common types of the virus are prepared and should be given to people at risk, particularly the elderly and those with chronic heart, chest or kidney diseases. Healthy children and adults do not need immunisation.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Children should not return to school until they have had at least 48 hours without a fever or any of the symptoms mentioned above, as they are still infectious. Any contacts of children with flu should go to school as normal.

If a child has any symptoms whilst at school, the parent will be asked to collect them as soon as possible to limit the spread of illness to other children.

It is also advisable for them to stay away from people who are likely to suffer more serious illness, such as the very young, the elderly and those with chronic health problems.

Measles

What is it?

Measles is one of the most infectious viral diseases and is also one of the most dangerous of children's diseases, sometimes leading to serious complications and long-term health problems. It is caused by the measles virus infecting people who have not been immunised against measles.

What are the Symptoms?

Measles feels just like flu at first along with pink eyes, a runny nose and a cough. The flu like feeling lasts for about 4-7 days before a red blotchy rash develops. This rash usually starts on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body and can last for 4-7 days.

Measles is usually a mild illness, although sometimes it can be severe and can cause ear and chest infections. It may result in brain damage and rarely, death.

How is it spread?

It is usually spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. People with the illness can pass it to others from shortly before the symptoms start until about five days after the rash appears. Once a person has had the disease, they cannot catch it again.

How can it be prevented?

The only effective way to prevent measles is to immunise all children against it with the MMR vaccine. This is part of the routine programme of childhood immunisation and consists of 2 doses. The MMR also gives protection against Rubella (German Measles) and Mumps.

If your child has not been immunised against measles or their immunisation programme is incomplete, it is strongly recommended that they are vaccinated with MMR. This will not only protect your children from the illness but will also prevent the spread of measles to others.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

To help prevent the spread of measles within school, children with measles should stay away from school until five days after the beginning of the rash. If your child has a condition or is having treatment which suppresses their immune system, you should see your GP immediately and tell him/her that your child may have been in contact with measles.

Mumps

What is it?

Mumps is an infectious viral disease caused by the paramyxovirus. It mainly affects the salivary glands, but sometimes other parts of the body are affected. Mumps usually affects children but can affect any age group.

What are the Symptoms?

Mumps usually begins with 2 or 3 days of discomfort and an increasing temperature. This is followed by the onset of discomfort and swelling of the parotid glands, which are situated below the ears and normally cannot be felt. The swelling can be in both glands or just one side and can cause the earlobes to stick out and the face to appear swollen. The mouth may feel dry and swallowing can be painful. Symptoms usually last for 3 or 4 days but can last for more than a week. Adult women may suffer inflammation of the ovaries and adult men may experience swelling of the testicles. Only on very rare occasions does

this lead to sterility. The mumps virus is a common cause of viral meningitis, which is usually very mild and has no after effects.

How is it spread?

Mumps is usually spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. Less often, it may be spread by direct contact with the saliva of someone with mumps. People with mumps can pass it to others from shortly before the symptoms start until just after the swelling has gone.

How can it be prevented?

The only effective way to prevent mumps is to immunise all children against it with the MMR vaccine as part of the routine programme of childhood immunisation.

If your child has not been immunised against mumps it is strongly recommended that they should be. This will not only protect your children

from the illness but will also prevent the spread of mumps to others.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

To help prevent the spread of mumps to others within school, children with mumps should stay away from school for five days after the onset of swollen glands.

Rubella (German Measles)

What is it?

Rubella is a mild illness caused by the rubella virus. If a pregnant mother catches rubella in the first 16 weeks of pregnancy her child is at an increased risk of being born with an ear, eye or heart problem or being mentally handicapped

How can it be prevented?

The only effective way to prevent rubella is to ensure that all children are immunised against it with the MMR vaccine that is part of the routine programme of childhood immunisation. This consists of two doses of MMR.

What are the Symptoms?

The symptoms of rubella are a widespread rash and a slightly raised temperature. The illness may go completely unnoticed as most people are perfectly well and many people do not develop a rash.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

To help prevent the spread of rubella to others within school, children with rubella should be kept away from school for five days from the start of the rash.

How is it spread?

Rubella is a highly infectious disease and is usually spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. People with the illness can pass it to others from at least one week before any symptoms develop up until about five days after the rash has appeared.

Scabies

What is it?

Scabies is caused by a minute insect (the scabies mite) that burrows into the skin, particularly in skin crease areas like wrists and hands.

What are the Symptoms?

Scabies causes severe itching of the skin, which is often worse at night. Repeated scratching can lead to visible scratch marks and these may become infected. Scabies may be present for 2-6 weeks before the itching begins. It is easily treated by using a cream or lotion from the GP.

How is it spread?

Scabies is spread from person to person by direct skin to skin contact. A person with scabies can spread the infection to others until he/she is successfully treated.

How can it be prevented?

In order to prevent scabies from spreading, it is important to treat everyone in the household even if they don't have an itch. People who have had skin contact with the infected person should also be treated. This is because there is often a delay of up to 6 weeks from being infected to getting an itch. Treating everyone in the house will kill all insects and prevent new cases in the family. The scabies mite dies very quickly away from the human body so clothes and bedding are not likely to be sources of infection. They may be washed in the usual way.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

All children should stay away from school until the day after treatment has started.

Slapped Cheek Syndrome

What is it?

This is a mild virus infection, which can affect children and adults. It is also known as 'Fifth disease' or 'Parvovirus'

How is it spread?

The infection is spread from person to person by coughs and sneezes. The incubation period is two to three weeks.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

By the time the rash has appeared, the person is no longer infectious. For this reason, children with the infection do not need to stay away from school.

What are the Symptoms?

The most striking feature is a bright red rash on the face, which looks like 'slapped cheeks' followed by a lacy pink rash all over the body. The illness is very mild, with little or no fever. Many adults have already got antibodies to this infection and are immune. Adults who get the infection may get joint pains or arthritis. People with sickle cell anaemia or thalassaemia can become anaemic as a result of the infection. In very rare cases, women who get the infection when they are in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy may have a miscarriage, or the baby may develop anaemia. However, 95% of women who catch this infection during pregnancy do not have any problems at all.

How can it be prevented?

Prevention is difficult as many infections occur with no symptoms. Children who have sickle cell anaemia, thalassaemia, or who are immunosuppressed, and pregnant women, should see their GP if they have been in contact with this disease. A blood test is available to test for immunity and the GP will be able to advise if any further action is needed.

Tonsillitis

What is it?

Tonsillitis means inflammation of the tonsils. It may be caused by a bacterial such as Streptococcus but most cases of tonsillitis are caused by a virus.

What are the Symptoms?

Tonsillitis usually presents with a sore throat, which may be severe. The tonsils are usually swollen and red, and may show spots of pus, or be covered with a white film of pus. There is often a very high fever, and headache. The glands in the neck are often swollen and the neck may be stiff and tender.

How is it spread?

The virus spreads from person to person by coughs and sneezes.

How can it be prevented?

Prevention is difficult, as the virus may spread easily from person to person. In most cases the GP will not prescribe an antibiotic as this is ineffective for viral infections. If the GP considers that the tonsillitis is likely to be caused by Streptococcal infection, antibiotics will be prescribed, which will reduce the spread to others.

Send to School or Keep at Home?

Children with tonsillitis will usually feel too poorly to go to school. They do not need to be excluded once they feel better

Further Information

The Kent Health Protection Unit have the following information leaflets available:

Telephone 01622 713059

Campylobacter
Chickenpox & Shingles
Clostridium Difficile
Cryptosporidiosis
Dysentery
E. coli O157
Gastroenteritis
Giardiasis
Hand Foot & Mouth Disease
Hepatitis A
Hepatitis B
Hygiene for Schools and Nurseries
Impetigo
Legionella
Measles
Meningococcal Disease
Molluscum Contagiosum
MRSA
Mumps
Parvovirus (Slapped Cheek)
Personal & Domestic Hygiene
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)
Psittacosis
PVL
Ringworm
Rubella
Salmonella
SARS
Scabies
Scarlet Fever
Streptococcal Infection
Threadworm
Tuberculosis
Verrucae



Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys
Langton Lane
Nackington Road
Canterbury
Kent
CT4 7AS

Tel: 01227 463567

www.thelangton.org.uk

Headteacher: Dr M N F Baxter