

# Common Childhood Illnesses

Your School Nurse would like to review some common childhood conditions and ask your cooperation in helping to keep our students healthy. Elementary aged children are especially at risk of spreading many contagious diseases since they are likely to come into close contact with other children through whispering, hugging, and a host of other activities, all normal for their age. It is important that the school be notified of any contagious conditions so that proper measures can be taken to protect schoolmates.

## Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)

This condition is when the white part of the eyeball (the sclera) is red. It has been known as "pink eye" for years. The causes range from allergies to viruses to bacterial infection. A child that says that his/her eye is "pasted shut" in the morning and the sclera is red may have a bacterial infection. The eye may tear and be sensitive to light. Any child who has a discharge of purulent material from the eye will be sent home.

## Head Lice

Lice are a common problem in elementary schools. It is not due to uncleanliness. Lice are small insects that do not fly or leap. They are about the size of a sesame seed and the eggs, called nits, are attached to a single hair shaft about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the scalp. There are many over-the-counter products that can kill lice. It is important to follow the directions carefully and remove all nits. Children need to be checked by the school nurse before re-entering school after they have been treated for lice. Just as important as treating the child is proper washing of personal items such as bed linens, coats, hats, combs, and brushes.

## Impetigo

This is a staph infection that needs to be treated with antibiotics. It looks like a wet yellow scab and may have pus coming from the wound. Your health care provider may choose to use an antibacterial ointment or an oral antibiotic. Your child may return to school when antibiotics have been in use for 24 hours.

## Pinworms

This is a very common condition in children. It is characterized by extreme itching in the anal region. These small worms can be captured on scotch tape early in the morning for diagnosis by a physician. Treatment is a course of antibiotics, many times for the entire family.

## Scabies

This is a small mite that burrows into the skin causing extreme itching (the "seven year itch"). They are usually found between the fingers, around the wrists and/or waist. The itching is more intense at night. Treatment is a prescription lotion.

### Ringworm

This is really not a worm at all but a fungal infection. It is characterized by a crusty ring around the circular area of infection and a clear center. There are over-the-counter products that can be used and the area will need to be covered in school.

### Hand Foot and Mouth Disease

This is usually caused by a coxsackie virus. It is a common illness of infants and children especially in the early fall. It is characterized by fever, poor appetite, malaise (feeling sick), and

frequently a sore throat. One or two days after the fever begins, sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then become ulcers. The rash that develops does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It is possible that the person may only have the rash or the mouth ulcers. The child recovers in 7 - 10 days usually without medical intervention. As always, if a fever is high or unusual symptoms develop, a physician should be consulted. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches and mouth sores. A mixture of equal amounts of Mylanta and liquid Benedryl may be used to ease mouth pain. This is not transmitted from pets or other animals and is not related to foot and mouth disease in cattle.

### Fifth Disease

Especially common in kids between the ages of 5 and 15, fifth disease typically produces a distinctive red rash on the face that makes the child appear to have a "slapped cheek."

The rash then spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs. Fifth disease is actually just a viral illness that most kids recover from quickly and without complications. Fifth disease begins with a low-grade fever, headache, and mild cold-like symptoms (a stuffy or runny nose).

These symptoms pass, and the illness seems to be gone until a rash appears a few days later. A child is usually not contagious once the rash appears.

### !!!!!! PREVENTION !!!!!!

The best preventive measure for all of the above conditions is proper hand washing. Teach your child to wash their hands before eating, after toileting, after playing outside, and after contact with animals. Wash all open wounds and cover them with a band aid. During the first few days of any disease, it helps to keep infected children at home to reduce transmission in school.