Parental Opinions on When Sick Students Should Stay Home Vary Widely

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According to a new national poll from the University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, parents hold very different views about how sick is too sick for kids to remain at home. But doctors offer some basic guidelines to follow the next time you must decide this for your child, ScienceDaily reports.

For the study, conducted last year, researchers for the hospital's National Poll on Children's Health dispensed surveys to 2,036 parents who had at least one child age 6 to 18. Findings showed that 75 percent of the 1,442 parents who responded to the inquiry disclosed at least one sick day for their child during 2016.

To decide whether to keep kids home from school, parents cited concern about a child's illness getting worse, fellow classmates becoming sick, missed tests or their children falling behind in schoolwork. In addition, 80 percent of parents said they weren't likely to send a child to class with diarrhea, and 58 percent reported they'd keep kids home if they vomited even just once without other symptoms present. Less than half of parents (49 percent) said they would keep their kids home if they had a slight fever but were otherwise feeling fine. Even fewer parents (16 percent) said that a child with red watery eyes or a runny nose or dry cough without a fever (12 percent) warranted a day out of the classroom.

Researchers noted that logistics also influenced parents' decisions to keep a child home from school. Not wanting to miss work was important for 11 percent of parents surveyed in the study, while 18 percent said that not being able to find someone to stay at home with their sick child was a key consideration.

When in doubt, doctors advise parents to call or visit their child's health care provider to help better determine the severity of the child's illness. Many medical experts agree that while a child suffering from a slight fever or a runny nose may not necessarily require a sick day, if these symptoms are accompanied by decreased appetite, lethargy, mood change or difficulty breathing, a day off may be needed for recovery. In addition, doctors recommend that kids with a persistent fever (one that lasts more than three days), vomiting, diarrhea or pain should definitely stay home from school.

Finally, if children are too young to manage their symptoms, experts suggest that parents keep them home as well.

Don’t let the flu keep your kids (or you) at home sick. Click here to learn more about this year’s flu season—predicted to be severe—and why you should get vaccinated ASAP.

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