

5 September 2023

Dear colleagues,

As children and young people return to school this week, we have been asked by the Department for Education to provide parents and carers with a clinical and public health perspective on mild illnesses and school attendance.

As we are all acutely aware, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have stretched well beyond the health sector. In particular, we have seen a rise in school absences, with a large proportion attributable to illness.

We are aware that the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused some parents to feel less confident with assessing whether their child is well enough to be in school and be concerned that it is less socially acceptable to send their child in when they are ill.

There is wide agreement among health professionals and educational professionals that school attendance is vital to the life chances of children and young people. Being in school improves health, wellbeing and socialisation throughout the life course. The greatest benefits come from children and young people attending school regularly.

We, as a profession, need to work alongside our colleagues in education to address health-related barriers to school attendance and maximise the short and longer-term benefits of being in school.

The NHS has produced the [‘is my child too ill for school’ guidance](#) to support parents in their decision-making and we would encourage you to share this with your practices and patients. In most cases you can reassure parents and carers that it is appropriate to send children to school with upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) symptoms, provided they don’t have a temperature.

In addition to respiratory illnesses, we are aware that after the worst of the pandemic more children may be absent from school due to symptoms of anxiety. Parents often need reassurance that worry and mild or moderate anxiety, whilst sometimes difficult emotions, can be a normal part of growing up for many children and young people. Being in school can often help alleviate the underlying issues. A prolonged period of absence is likely to heighten their children’s anxiety about attending in the future, rather than reduce it. We ask you to continue supporting families to build up children’s confidence to attend school regularly and to encourage those who are experiencing persistent symptoms to access additional support.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) recently approved [‘five principles to promote school attendance’](#). We hope this guidance will support you in having conversations with your patients and their families about school attendance.

Thank you for your continued commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Yours sincerely,



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