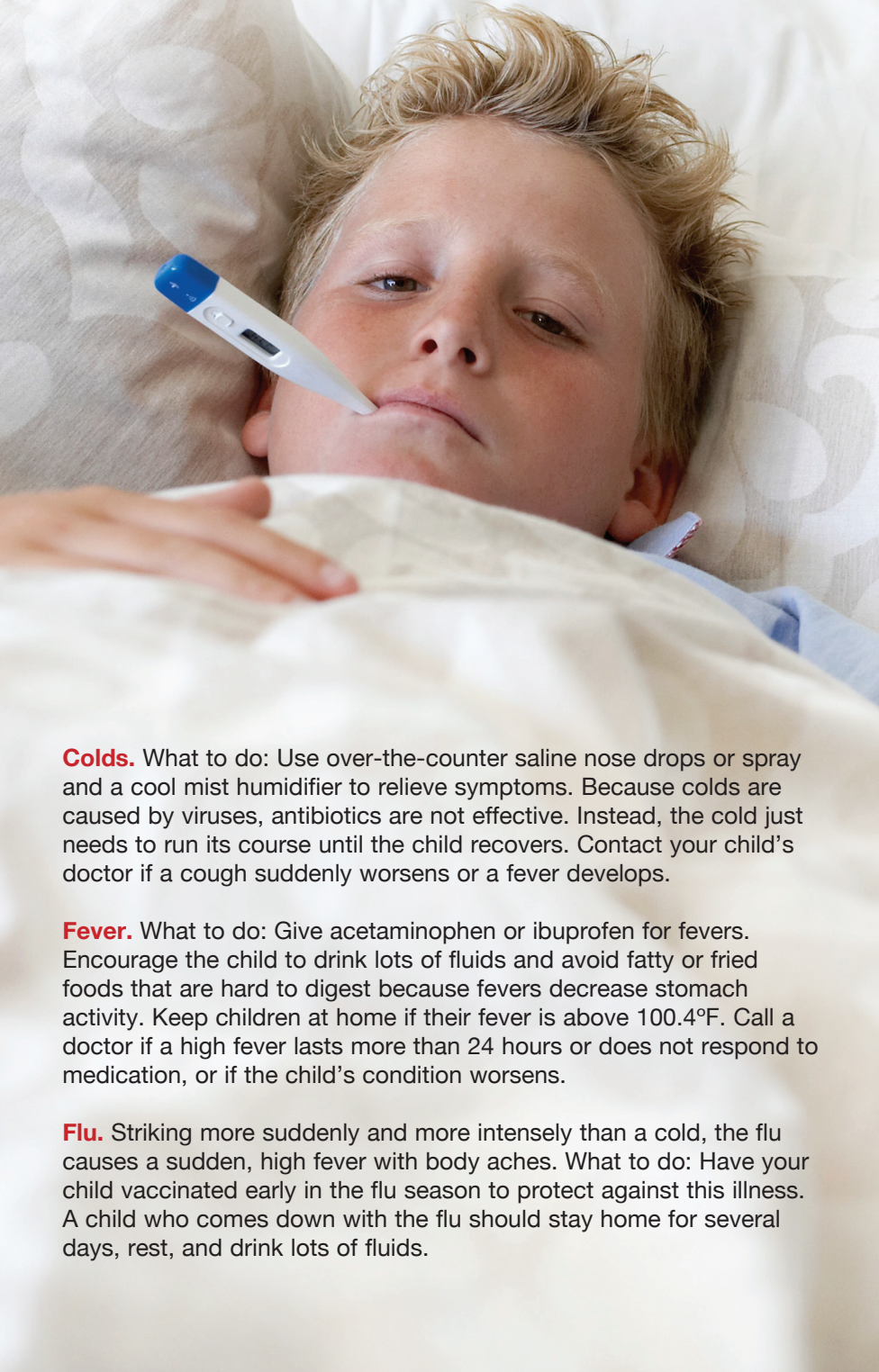


# Self-Care Corner

## Too sick for school?

Colds? Flu? What to do? Sending a sick child to school can make matters worse and spread the illness to others. Follow these guidelines from pediatrician Dr. Jacqueline Kaari, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, who said, “Parents need to be able to quickly assess their child and determine if he or she is well enough to go to school or needs to stay home, or if it’s time to call the pediatrician. Sometimes, parents will guess wrong, but if there’s one rule of thumb, it should be to always err on the side of caution.”



**Colds.** What to do: Use over-the-counter saline nose drops or spray and a cool mist humidifier to relieve symptoms. Because colds are caused by viruses, antibiotics are not effective. Instead, the cold just needs to run its course until the child recovers. Contact your child’s doctor if a cough suddenly worsens or a fever develops.

**Fever.** What to do: Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fevers. Encourage the child to drink lots of fluids and avoid fatty or fried foods that are hard to digest because fevers decrease stomach activity. Keep children at home if their fever is above 100.4°F. Call a doctor if a high fever lasts more than 24 hours or does not respond to medication, or if the child’s condition worsens.

**Flu.** Striking more suddenly and more intensely than a cold, the flu causes a sudden, high fever with body aches. What to do: Have your child vaccinated early in the flu season to protect against this illness. A child who comes down with the flu should stay home for several days, rest, and drink lots of fluids.

**Conjunctivitis (“pink eye”).** A red, weeping eye(s) with a thick discharge that could become crusty when sleeping. What to do: Contact your child’s doctor for treatment, which may include antibiotic eye drops. Conjunctivitis can be highly contagious. Follow the doctor’s advice. Children can usually return to school 24 to 48 hours after treatment begins. Check with the school’s policy.

**Head lice.** Tiny, crawling bugs that live on the scalp and feed on blood. Itching and sores on the scalp can be signs of head lice. The insects cannot jump or fly and are spread by human contact. What to do: Under bright light, check the entire scalp closely for lice or tiny white eggs (called nits), starting at the upper neck and behind the ears. Lotions and shampoos that can kill the lice are available at the drug store. Keep the child home from school until the lice have completely gone away.

**Sore throat.** What to do: Have the child drink a few sips of water. If that relieves the symptoms, you are likely dealing with, at worst, a viral infection that will go away with a few days of rest, plenty of liquids, and pain relievers. If you suspect strep throat, follow the fever guidelines and contact your child’s doctor.

**Stomach ache.** What to do: Keep children who have been vomiting home from school. Wait an hour after the child vomits and encourage small drinks of water. Gradually introduce clear liquids and bland foods throughout the day. Contact your doctor if vomiting lasts beyond 24 hours, occurs with worsening pain at the belly button or lower right abdomen, or if the child vomits blood or green or yellow matter.