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School Nurse Notes

It's that time of the year for bonfires and s'mores, pumpkin carving and corn mazes, Trick or Treating, and my favorite of all; sweatshirts and boots. Unfortunately, this time of the year also brings a variety of viral colds and illnesses. Below you will find information about a few illnesses that are commonly seen this time of year. As a reminder, any temperature over 100 degrees is considered a fever. Your child must be fever free for 24 hours (without the use of Tylenol or Ibuprofen) before returning to school.

- Mrs. Marcia McDowell, RN

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (Coxsackie Virus)

Hand foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is most common in the summer and early fall. HFMD is a mild illness occurring most often in children between the ages of 5-15 years, but can also occur in adolescents and adults. HFMD is characterized by symptoms that can include sudden onset of fever, fatigue, poor appetite, and sore throat followed by sores in the mouth 1-2 days later. These sores are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheek and can be very painful. A skin rash then develops, which is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, giving this illness its name hand, foot, and mouth disease.

Transmission of this virus is through direct contact with drainage from the nose and throat, and through the fecal-oral route. A person can spread HFMD during the acute stage of the illness and may be able to spread the virus for several weeks after symptoms resolve which is why this illness is so contagious. There is no specific treatment and symptoms typically resolve on their own without complications.

Students may be excluded from school during the first few days of illness, when they are most contagious. Exclusion of ill persons does not prevent additional cases since the virus can be excreted for weeks after the symptoms disappear. Also, some persons excreting the virus, including most adults, may have no symptoms.

Pink Eye

Pink eye, medically termed conjunctivitis, is an inflammation or infection of the eye that has many different causes including viruses, bacteria, or allergies. Signs and symptoms of pink eye usually improve within three to seven days. When tearing and matted eyes are no longer present, it's appropriate for a child to return to school.

Viral conjunctivitis- usually affects only one eye, which has excessive watering and a light discharge. Crusting on eyelids sometimes occurs. Viral conjunctivitis is contagious, and like other viruses, antibiotics can't treat it. Unless there's a special reason to do so, doctors don't normally prescribe medication for viral conjunctivitis, because usually it clears up on its own in a few days or weeks. Over the counter artificial tears eye drops and warm or cold compresses can help alleviate some of the discomfort.

Bacterial conjunctivitis- often spreads to both eyes and causes a heavy discharge, sometimes greenish. Crusting may appear on eyelids. Bacterial conjunctivitis generally remains contagious as long as your child is experiencing tearing and matted eyes. Antibiotic eye ointments or drops may help eliminate it.

Allergic conjunctivitis- causes itching, redness and excessive tearing in both eyes. The nose also may be stuffy, itchy and runny. Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious; it occurs when irritants such as allergens, dust and smoke are in the environment. Artificial tears may dilute irritants in the eye's tear film, and antihistamine allergy pills or eye drops also may help control symptoms. Children may remain at school if conjunctivitis is due to allergies.