

# Finding Child Care When My Child is Sick

If you have a child who is in child care or school, there may be times when they are not able to attend due to mild illness. You may find yourself in need of back-up care with short notice. Thinking about sick child care options ahead of time can help you avoid scrambling to locate care at the last minute.



## When is my child too sick to attend their regular child care?

Licensed child care providers have requirements around caring for children who are sick. These requirements are in place to keep all children healthy and safe. Specific guidelines vary by state. If you already use a licensed child care provider, they should have a written sick child policy. The policy should be based on licensing regulations and clearly state when a child should not be in care due to illness. Ask to see your provider's sick child policy for more information.

You may also ask your child care licensing office or your local Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency about symptoms or illnesses that would exclude a child from regular child care. Visit our [Resource Map](#) and click on your state to find licensing information, or [search for your local CCR&R here](#).

## Who can care for my child when they are sick?

The type of illness or symptoms that your child has may affect the type of sick child care you need. A child with a very contagious illness or with symptoms that require close monitoring would likely need one-on-one care. However, a child with mild symptoms or illness (e.g., a low-grade fever, an ear infection) might be fine in a setting where more than one child is present.

In some areas there are child care options specifically for children with mild illness. These options may or may not be licensed, and the child care providers may have different types of credentials.

Examples of sick child care options:



A sick child care center operated by a local hospital or clinic where the staff are nurses.



A licensed child care center or home with a separate "sick child care" room where staff are child care providers.



An individual in your area that cares for children who are ill on an as-needed basis. If care is provided in the individual's home, they may or may not be required to have a child care license.

Programs like the examples above are not widely available. However, your local CCR&R can tell you if there are any nearby. If there are no sick child care programs locally, think creatively and plan ahead.

- If you are working, ask your employer about options like remote work, flexing your time, or taking sick leave to care for a child who is ill.

- Ask your pediatrician if they have referrals for child care options when your child is mildly ill.
- Consider in-home child care options:
  - a. Do you have nearby family or friends you would trust to care for your child? Would any of them be willing and able to care for your child when they are mildly ill?
  - b. Do you know of babysitters or nannies who could offer back-up child care? You can also reach out to local nanny agencies to ask if they have nannies that offer sick child care.
  - c. Do you know of any responsible high school or college students who are home and who you would trust to care for your child when they are sick?
  - d. Are there local colleges or universities with programs for health professions, child development and/or education? If so, you could contact the programs and ask if any of their students would be interested in being called to care for a sick child.

## What do I need to think about when choosing sick child care?

It is important to vet potential child care providers before the need for sick child care arises. Some questions are especially important for this type of care.

For more questions to ask any potential child care provider, visit [childcareaware.org/families/choosing-quality-child-care/selecting-child-care-program/](https://childcareaware.org/families/choosing-quality-child-care/selecting-child-care-program/)

- Is the provider required to have a child care license? If not, why not? (Note: Depending on your state's requirements and the type of child care, a provider or program may not need to have a license.) If they must be licensed, is their license in good standing?
- What training or experience does the provider have in caring for children, specifically sick children?
- If choosing a child care provider that you do not know well, do they have clear background checks for every person caring for children?
- Would each person caring for your child be certified in infant/child First Aid and CPR?
- What illnesses or symptoms is the provider comfortable handling?
- Could the provider give medication to your child? Talk with them about safely administering medication, including proper storage and documentation of doses.
- If other children could be present, how would the provider or program keep children separated to prevent the spread of illnesses? How do they supervise children who are ill, especially if they must be separated? If it's possible that more than one child could be present, talk about how the provider would actively supervise children and meet their needs.
- What type of cleaning and sanitation procedures are in place? Are toys, equipment, materials, surfaces and bathrooms sanitized after a child uses them?
- Does the provider wash their hands often? Do they help the children wash their hands before eating, after using the bathroom and other times as necessary?
- Is the provider able to give extra attention to a child who needs it? Infants and toddlers especially may need to be held for extended amounts of time when they're not feeling well.
- Will your child be able to rest as needed? Will they have an individually assigned bed, cot or crib that meets safe sleep requirements for young children or infants?
- Is the provider able to accommodate your child's needs for food and drink?
- How would the provider update you about your child? Be sure to let them know what changes you would want to know about immediately, such as rising temperature, vomiting, etc.

