Should I bring my sick kid to a holiday party?



photo by Lexi Logan

The guidelines for school are straight forward. If your child is sick, the school nurse will tell you exactly what criteria your child needs to meet before she returns to school. The list generally looks like this: no fever of 101 degrees or higher for over 24 hours, no constant running to the bathroom, no vomiting for 24 hours, etc. However, Grandpa's house is not school. A friend's home is not school. The guidelines to attending holiday gatherings are not as straightforward.

First and foremost: If you are invited to a social gathering and you have an ill child, tell your family and friends who will be there that you have an ill child. You never know if

there will be people present who are particularly vulnerable to illness. Some of you have an Uncle Harry who has been too embarrassed to tell you that he is undergoing chemotherapy for prostate cancer or a sister Sarah just found out she is pregnant. Young babies and the elderly are more likely to develop complications if they are ill. On the other hand, if family members or friends all have intact immune systems and have no special risk factors for illness complications, they may be more forgiving and will want to see their ill nephew/cousin/friend who they just flew 400 miles to see. The key is communication.

Babies under two months old, because of their age and unimmunized status, are vulnerable to life threatening infections. Remember that a nagging cough in a toddler can be a life threatening cough for an infant. So you might reconsider bringing your coughing toddler to a gathering where there will be very young infants.

Don’t get lulled into believing that germs are killed by Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen). Even if you have hidden your child’s fever with a fever reducing medicine, she is contagious as long as something is spewing from any orifice (nose, eyes, mouth, or bottom).

So if you are going to a family gathering, and your child is mildly ill, here’s how to minimize spread of germs:

1. Handwashing – wash your ill child’s hands often to prevent spread of their germs. Also you should wash your healthy children’s hands to prevent illness.
2. Handwashing (again!) -wash hands before eating and after bathroom use
3. Handwashing (again!!)- wash your own hands after you have helped your child do the above suggestions.
4. When all the children are piled in a heap watching The Grinch, take time to separate your ill child from the batch. Daycares put two feet between sleeping cots in

order to minimize spread of germs. Protect airspaces.
5. Elderly people will be happy to observe your runny-nosed children frolicking about from the distance. No need to force your five year old with the runny nose to kiss great- grandma’s face.
6. Teach kids to cough into crook of elbow, to use tissues…and then wash hands.

If you realize that you will be dragging a medicine cabinet with you to a party, reconsider going. One mom says she cringes whenever she sees her sister show up to parties carting along a medication nebulization machine for her child. Consider what is best for your child. No matter how much your child, and you, have anticipated the holiday gathering, home is always the most comfortable place for a child to recover from illness.

Thinking hard about whether or not you should attend a holiday gathering? Then you are thinking too hard. Just stay home. Besides, you haven’t been a real parent until you’ve missed at least one party because of a child’s illness.

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