

Schools sound caution over virus

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Calcutta: As viral infections continue to affect children across Calcutta, more schools are issuing advisories urging parents to keep unwell children at home to prevent the spread of infections.

St Xavier's Collegiate School has issued an advisory, and at St James' School, teachers are telling parents to not send children to school if they are sick.

Metro reported last week that La Martiniere for Girls had issued a similar advisory, asking parents not to send children with a cough, cold or sore throat.

"Last week was very bad when children were falling sick in school, and we had to call for parents. Some of the symptoms are feeling sick, vomiting and running a temperature," said Terence Ireland, principal, St James' School.

"We are telling parents to see a doctor and not neglect their condition and not send them to school with symptoms," Ireland said.

St Xavier's Collegiate School principal Father Rohan Tirkey said there were some "rare cases" of children

ADVISORY

- Avoid going to school with a sore throat, fever, cough or cold
- If infected, children should return to school at least 48 hours after remission of fever
- Avoid swimming pools or crowded places where you can infect someone else

coming to school while unwell, and they were being sent back.

"It is a practice we have throughout the year where we discourage children from coming to school if they are sick. Some children are worried about their attendance, but when they show a medical certificate, they are excused," said Fr Tirkey.

The advisory also mentions that the children must keep themselves hydrated, wash their hands, follow hygiene and bring healthy home-made tiffin to school.

"Children run around and sweat, so we provide them a set of clothes to change after the break, so that they don't go into air-conditioned class-

rooms in those clothes. Some children bring another set," said Fr Tirkey.

Sri Sri Academy, Mahadevi Birla World Academy and The Newtown School are some of the other institutions where children are either absent or being taken to the infirmary.

Apurba Ghosh, executive director, Institute of Child Health, said children reporting to the outpatient department went up in the last fortnight.

"The number of children in the OPD went up by 20% in the last 15 to 20 days. They are coming with complaints of respiratory tract infection and fever. It is starting from six months old to 15 years," said Ghosh.

"Smaller children up to five or six years of age are getting more serious than those above 10 years of age," Ghosh said.

Doctors said many children were reporting high fever, which needs to be managed carefully at home.

"It is scary when your child's temperature is going to 104 degrees Fahrenheit, but indiscriminately giving antibiotics, especially in the first 72 hours, sometimes

depletes the beneficial bacteria that are in the airways to protect the child and then the recovery time gets prolonged. In the first 72 hours, if you can control the high fever with safe doses of paracetamol and maintain hydration, generally it would resolve, and you can avoid courses of antibiotics," said paediatrician Shamik Ghosh, honorary secretary of the Adolescent Health Academy of India.

The onset is because of seasonal changes and high humidity, which causes a proliferation of influenza and rhinovirus and various types of viruses that find their way into the airway, said Shamik Ghosh.

If someone is infected, especially children, they need to be kept away from school for at least 48 hours after remission of the fever.

Swimming pools and crowded places should be avoided by an infected person, cautioned doctors.

"Any place where a droplet infection can be transmitted will need a certain amount of restriction of entry because human-to-human transmission has to be prevented," Shamik Ghosh said.