

Can you tell if your child is ill?

BY SAUDAH NABATANZI

Many parents remember days as children when they or their friends, vehemently resisted going to school. The tantrums and excuses of being sick fell on deaf ears of the tough parents.

True, a number of times children may feign illness because it is

difficult to leave the warmth of the blanket on a chilly morning. However, there are instances, where a child may be genuinely ill. So, how does a parent or teacher know that a child is sick?

Alice Akugizibwe, a clinical officer, says once the child's temperature goes up, it is one way to tell that the child's body is fighting against

the illness. A fever is a sign of illness.

She also notes that at times, parents ignore these symptoms of the sickness and only realise the child is sick when admission is recommended.

Akugizibwe says every parent should know their child's personality and general behaviour to tell if there is any change.

With most children fearing the pain of injection or swallowing tablets, some children wear a brave face even when ill.

Medical personnel say a child's average normal body temperature should be at about 37°C.

In another instance, Daniel Musinguzi, a medical doctor, advises parents to compare what they see to what the child says.

"If your child is eating pancakes and sausages and complaining of stomach pain, then that is something you should probably ignore," Musinguzi says. "However, if he is refusing to eat or drink, then that is something that you need to be concerned about."

He adds that vomiting after a meal, diarrhoea, pale skin, and restlessness can all indicate there is sickness. Others include loss of appetite, shivers and seizures.

Dr Peter Mugenyi, a paediatrician with Joint Clinical Research Centre, Kampala, says there are abstract symptoms, including headache, abdominal pain, throat pain (which children call neck pain) and difficulty in breathing.

Dr Josephine Namukwaya, a paediatrician at AAR Health Centre, says a sick child may also frequent the toilet. This can be attributed to a urinary tract infection.

"As a result of the infection, the bladder is irritated by little urine and does not wait to fill up. The child will end up going to the toilet a lot just to ease themselves," she explains.

A running stomach or diarrhoea can also make a child frequent the toilet.

Importantly, some children will display symptoms of diseases like cough, flu, fever and vomiting.

"The cough may be bad such that it causes wheezing and difficulty in breathing," Namukwaya notes.

He advises that if a child complains of any of these symptoms they have to be taken to a doctor.

Mugenyi says adults tell their sickness, but children demonstrate it.

"There is no need for a child to tell you about their sickness. You simply observe them. A slight change in behaviour can tell it all," Mugenyi says.

He says when a child is sick, they are at their normal behaviour. For instance, a usually playful child will be reserved.

If one is observant, they will notice that the child stays away from peers during playing moment.

Mugenyi says in order to make such conclusions, one requires a parent or teacher to study the child's lifestyle.

First aid

If a child is irritable and weak, put them in a comfortable position or make them lay down.

Namukwaya says if a child has a fever it is important to cool them down so as to avoid the onset of convulsions.

"Ensure that you use lukewarm water in a cloth, as you rub the child's body. Avoid cold water because it might trigger convulsions," she notes.

You can also remove a child's clothes. However, the weather plays a huge role here as you cannot remove a child's clothes when it is cold.

If a child is vomiting, it is advisable to place them in a good position and clean them. A child that is suffering from diarrhoea should be given fluids to prevent dehydration.

In situations where a child has a bad cough, Namukwaya advises that they are immediately taken to hospital for medical attention.

In specific situations like convulsions, Akugizibwe says the teacher should place the child in a secure position.

It is important to inform the school nurse or medical personnel for any illness, for further medical assistance. If the child is at school, parent should be notified immediately.

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First aid

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