

Fever

If your child has a fever, it is probably a sign that her body is fighting an infection. When your child becomes ill because of a virus or bacteria, her body may respond by increasing body temperature. It is important to remember that, except in the case of heat stroke, fever itself is not an illness—only a symptom of one. Fever itself also is not a sign that your child needs an antibiotic.

Many conditions, such as an ear infection, a common cold, the flu, a urinary tract infection, or pneumonia, may cause a child to develop a fever. In some cases, medication, injury, poison, or an extreme level of overactivity may produce a fever. An environment that is too hot may result in heat stroke, a potentially dangerous rise in body temperature. It is important to look for the cause of the fever.

Fevers are generally harmless and help your child fight infection. They can be considered a good sign that your child's immune system is working and the body is trying to rid itself of the infection.

The main purpose for treating fever is to help your child feel better. Reducing her temperature may make her more comfortable until the illness that has caused the fever has been treated or, more likely, run its course.

As long as your child is older than 2 months and there is an obvious reason why he (or she) feels warm—the presence of a cold, for example—it is usually unnecessary to take his temperature. You *should* take your child's temperature, however, if he is younger than 2 months or is not breathing, drinking, or acting as he normally does. If you are concerned about these activities, speak with your doctor, whether or not you detect a fever.

What is a fever?

A fever is a body temperature that is higher than normal. Your child's normal body temperature varies with his age, general health, activity level, the time of day, and how much clothing he is wearing. Everyone's temperature tends to be lower early in the morning and higher between late afternoon and early evening. Body temperature also will be slightly higher with strenuous exercise.

Most pediatricians consider any thermometer reading above **100°F** a sign of a fever in a newborn. This number may vary depending on the method used for taking your child's temperature. If you call your pediatrician, say which method you used.

Signs and symptoms of a fever

If your child has a fever, her heart and breathing rates naturally will speed up. You may notice that your child feels warm. She may appear flushed or perspire more than usual. Her body also will require more fluids.

Some children feel fine when they have a fever. However, most will have symptoms of the illness that is causing the fever. Your child may have an earache, a sore throat, a rash, or a stomachache. These signs can provide important clues as to the cause of your child's fever.

How to take your child's temperature

While you often can tell if your child is warmer than usual by feeling his forehead, only a thermometer can tell if he has a fever and how high the temperature is. There are several types of thermometers and methods for taking your child's temperature.

If your child is younger than 3 years of age, taking his temperature with a rectal digital thermometer provides the best reading.

- Clean the end of the thermometer with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Rinse it with cool water. Do not rinse with hot water.
- Put a small amount of lubricant, such as petroleum jelly, on the end.
- Place your child belly down across your lap or on a firm surface. Hold him by placing your palm against his lower back, just above his bottom.
- With the other hand, turn on the thermometer switch and insert the thermometer 0.5" to 1" into the anal opening. Hold the thermometer in place loosely with 2 fingers, keeping your hand cupped around your child's bottom. Do not insert the thermometer too far. Hold in place for about 1 minute, until you hear the beep. Remove the thermometer to check the digital reading.

If you choose to use a digital pacifier thermometer, be sure it stays in your infant's mouth for at least 3 1/2 minutes. For a child between 3 months and 5 years, a digital rectal thermometer is the best choice. An armpit (called Axillary) temperature, though not as accurate as a digital rectal reading, is also acceptable in this age group.

An ear thermometer may be unreliable, especially in a child younger than 1 year of age. It may be used in children older than 1 year but is not as accurate as the rectal temperature.

For a child older than 5 years, use an oral digital thermometer if the child is willing to cooperate by holding it under the tongue for the required time.

When to give over-the-counter medicine for fever

If your child is uncomfortable and older than 2 months, you may start anti-fever medicine at any temperature elevation. If your child is younger than 2 months, call us before starting any anti-fever medicine.

Acetaminophen is the only over-the-counter anti-fever medicine that should be used in a child younger than 6 months. Give it every four to six hours as needed. Ibuprofen may not be given. With any anti-fever medicine, check the label to see whether it is appropriate for a child, what medications it contains, and the frequency with which it should be given. Be aware that some cold medicines contain acetaminophen, so read the label carefully to avoid accidentally giving your child double the correct dose of acetaminophen. Measure doses of all medicines carefully to avoid dosing errors. Do not give aspirin, in any form, to an infant or child; it has been linked to Reye syndrome, a potentially fatal illness.

Call Your Child's Physician Immediately If:

- Looks very ill, is unusually drowsy, or is very fussy
- Has been in an extremely hot place, such as an overheated car
- Has additional symptoms such as a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe ear pain, an unexplained rash, or repeated vomiting or diarrhea abdominal pain or pain upon urination.
- You are worried about your child's breathing, level of activity, or intake or loss of fluids, whether or not your child has a fever.
- Your child is not drinking fluids nor has a decreased amount of urine.
- Has a condition that suppresses immune responses, such as sickle-cell disease or cancer, or is taking steroids
- Has had a seizure
- Is younger than 2 months of age and has a rectal temperature of more than **100°F**

Also Call If The Fever Persists For

- More than 24 hours in a child younger than 2 years of age
- More than 3 days in a child 2 years of age or older