

FEVER

What is fever?

Fever is the body's normal response to infections and is helpful in fighting them. Most fevers are caused by viral illness and are not harmful to the child. Your child has a fever if their rectal temp is greater than 100.4° F, or is greater than 99.4° F from any other area.

Expected course:

Most fevers with viral illnesses range between 101° and 104° and last for 2-3 days. In general, the height of the fever doesn't relate to the seriousness of the illness. Fevers as high as 105° can be entirely normal. How sick your child acts is what really counts. When the fever is high, they may look pale, red-checked and subdued, but as the fever comes down a bit, they should look better. The fever may go up and down during the course of the day and is often much higher in the evening.

What to do if your child has fever:

- Stay calm. Fever itself is NOT harmful.
- The reason to treat the fever is to make your child more comfortable. If the fever is less than 102° F (38.9° C) and your child seems comfortable, consider not treating the fever. It will help your child to more effectively fight the infection.
- If your child seems uncomfortable, fever reducing drugs such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) may be given (see dosing chart.) **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN**, especially for influenza or chickenpox- it can have very serious consequences (Reye's Syndrome.)
- Dress your child lightly but comfortably. Never overdress, bundle or cover as this will retain heat and increase your child's temperature and misery.
- Encourage the drinking of fluids. Extra fluid is lost due to the increased body temperature. Your child may have no interest in eating, this is normal with illness. It is very important that they drink adequate fluids. Popsicles and cold drinks may be most appealing.
- If fever is over 104° F, your child may feel better sponging with lukewarm water, after giving a fever reducer. Sponge your child in a tub of lukewarm water for about 20 minutes, this should reduce the temperature by 1-2 degrees and improve their level of comfort. Remember, sponging is to make your child more comfortable and if they are shivering or are strongly resistant, stop the bath. **NEVER** use alcohol to sponge your child- this can be poisonous.
- All children get fevers. A few (about 4%) will develop seizure (febrile convulsion). These are generally harmless, although terrifying to watch. (See our Febrile Seizure page.)

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Fever (rectal temp > 100.4 F) in an infant less than 3 months old.
- Fever over 105 F (40.6 C)
- Fever with significant difficulty breathing (remember, when your child has a fever, they will breathe faster than usual or pant, and their heart will beat faster- this is normal.)
- Fever accompanied by inability to arouse the child, inability to bend the head so that the chin touches the chest or child looks or acts very sick.

Call within 24 hours if:

- Your child has fever and is between 3-6 months old.
- The fever is between 104° and 105° F (40°-40.6° C)
- Your child has a fever for more than 24 hours without an obvious cause (i.e. diarrhea, congestion, cough)
- Your child has had a fever for more than 3 days.
- The fever went away for more than 24 hours then returned.
- You have other concerns or questions.