



Fever

WHAT DO I REALLY NEED TO KNOW?

Fever is the body's natural way of fighting infection. Normal body temperature ranges from 97° to 100°F (36.1° to 37.5°C). A fever is a temperature of more than 100.4°F (38.0°C).

The most common cause of fever in children is a minor infection like a cold. It could be, however, a more serious infection. How high the fever goes does not indicate how bad the infection is.

Different types of thermometers operate on different parts of the body. If you suspect your child has a fever, take a temperature. This can be done by placing a thermometer under your child's tongue, under the arm in the armpit area, in your child's ear, or in the rectum.

If you choose the rectal method, be sure to use a thermometer designed for the rectum. When using a digital thermometer, carefully read and follow the instructions found on the package insert before use. Never insert the thermometer tip farther than ½ inch, or as instructed. The tip of this thermometer is more round than the oral or armpit thermometers. Also, a rectal temperature is usually one degree higher than an oral or armpit temperature.

Do not use fever strips because they are not accurate.

IF YOUR CHILD'S TEMPERATURE IS HIGHER THAN THE NORMAL RANGE (97°–100°F), ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- HOW ILL DOES MY CHILD SEEM?
- IS MY CHILD FUSSY?
- IS MY CHILD SLEEPY OR DOES MY CHILD HAVE NO ENERGY?

If the answer is yes to any of these, try to reduce the fever with the methods listed on the following page.

Note: If your child is less than two-months-old, you should always call a doctor if you think your child has a fever.

Bringing the fever down

If the temperature is above 100.4°F, a variety of methods can be used to reduce the fever. The goal is to help heat leave the child's body without causing the child to shiver or have goose bumps. Shivering actually causes the temperature to go up. A fever can be brought down in the following ways:

1. Dress your child in thin pajamas, shorts, underwear, or diapers. It is normal to want to bundle the child, but bundling will increase the temperature.
2. Cover your child with only a sheet or leave him uncovered. Do not cover with blankets until the temperature returns to normal.
3. Make sure the room gets lots of moving air. Small fans may be used to keep air moving.
4. Give your child lots of fluids. Fluids are needed to help get rid of infection and replace the fluids that are lost through the skin during a fever.

Medicines

- Because fever helps the body fight infection, it is helpful to give medicine only after the fever is above 101°F (38.4°C).
- Do not give your child aspirin. Studies have linked aspirin with brain, liver, kidney damage, and Reye's syndrome.
- The best way to bring down a fever is to give acetaminophen (a-seat-a-MEN-o-fen). Common brand names for acetaminophen are Tylenol®, Tempra®, Liquiprin®, and Panadol®. These drugs reduce fever and relieve pain. Antibiotics do not reduce fever or relieve pain.
- Acetaminophen comes in drops, syrup, and chewable tablets. The dose (amount given) is based on your child's weight. Most bottles will have a chart with the correct dose by weight on it. It is important to know that drops are usually stronger than syrup so you do not have to use as much.
- Be sure to read the directions carefully. Acetaminophen may be given every four hours, but only give the amount that is recommended on the bottle.

MERCURY GLASS THERMOMETERS

Primary Children's Medical Center will not distribute nor provide information about using mercury glass thermometers. Mercury (sometimes called quicksilver) is a dangerous material. Mercury-glass thermometers are not available in stores; digital thermometers have replaced them. If a mercury-glass thermometer ever breaks, do not touch the mercury—it is very poisonous. Use gloves and clean it up with something that can be thrown away.

Do not simply throw mercury-containing or mercury-glass thermometers away in the trash, because the mercury is considered "hazardous waste." You can call your local Household Hazardous Waste hotline or Health Department for instructions on how to dispose of any mercury thermometers you may have.

Source: Intermountain Healthcare Primary Children's Medical Center, 2007; <https://intermountainhealthcare.org/ext/Dcmnt?ncid=520408205>

Call your doctor if...

- You have a newborn baby under 90 days old who develops a fever, call immediately!
- Your child is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child has a fever above 104°F (40°C) or fever that will not go down after you give acetaminophen.
- Your child vomits (throws up) frequently or with unusual force.
- Your child has a seizure (see complications below).
 - Your child has a stiff neck.
- Your child looks ill, cries constantly, seems to be in pain, is unresponsive, or overly sleepy, whether there is a temperature or not.
- Your child has difficulty taking fluids or there are fewer wet diapers.
- A low fever (under 101°F) continuing more than 48 hours, even if your child seems well.

Complications of Fevers

Rapid temperature changes can cause seizures (convulsions). Your child may appear unconscious and his arms and legs may jerk. This may last from a few seconds to several minutes.

Place the child on his side or on his stomach with his head turned to one side. Remove anything (such as a pacifier, or bottle) that may be in his mouth. Do not place your fingers or anything else in his mouth! Be sure to remove any objects that are around him so he does not hit them during the seizure. Call your doctor immediately after the seizure. It is normal for your child to be sleepy after the seizure. If the seizure has not stopped after 10 minutes, call the paramedics.

