

Fever

What is a fever?

A fever is when your child's body temperature is higher than 100.4°F (38° C). Normal body temperature can be anywhere between 97° F to 100°F. (36° to 37.7° C.)

What causes a fever?

Fevers are the body's natural response to an infection, like a cold or the flu. A high fever does not necessarily mean your child has a more serious infection.

How should I take my child's temperature?

Take your child's temperature using a **digital thermometer**. Always follow the manufacturer instructions. Temperatures can be taken:

- Under the tongue (oral)
- In the bottom (rectal)
- In the armpit
- In the ear
- Across the forehead (temporal or no-contact)

Do not use fever strips; they are not accurate.

A **rectal thermometer** is the most accurate way to measure temperature, especially in babies. It is usually 1 degree higher than an oral or armpit temperature. To take a rectal temperature:

- Read the thermometer instructions to make sure it can be used in the rectum.
- Insert the thermometer tip no more than ½ inch into the rectum (or as a doctor instructs).

Note: If your child is younger than 3 months old and you think they have a fever, call your child's health provider first.



Taking a temperature with a no-contact thermometer.



Taking a temperature with the thermometer in the armpit.



Taking a temperature with the thermometer in the ear.

How can I lower my child's fever?

If your child's temperature is above 100.4°F (38° C), you can help reduce their fever by:

- Dressing them in thin pajamas, shorts, underwear, or diapers
- Leaving them uncovered or covering them with only a thin sheet
- Using a small fan to make sure the air in your child's room is moving. (Avoid aiming the fan directly at your child.)
- Encouraging your child to drink liquids.

Don't put your child in a cold bath. This can cause chills (shivering,) which may cause their temperature to rise.

What medicine can I use to bring my child's fever down?

A child with a fever may feel achy, irritable, and miserable. If your child is uncomfortable and has a fever higher than 101°F (38.3°C), you can give them:

- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) every 4 hours as needed but no more than 5 times in 24 hours
- **Ibuprofen** (Advil, others) every 6 to 8 hours as needed (for children 6 months old and older) with food

Read the directions on the bottle carefully to make sure you are giving your child the right amount of medicine.

Never give your child aspirin. It has been linked to Reye's syndrome, a rare illness that can cause brain and liver damage.

Remember: A low-grade fever (under 101°F or 38.3°C) is not harmful. Fever helps the body fight infection.

What if my child has a seizure during their fever?

A rapid change in body temperature, like a sudden fever, can cause **febrile seizures** (convulsions). During a seizure, your child may appear unconscious, and their arms and legs may jerk. This may last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes. They may also be sleepy after the seizure.

If your child has a seizure:

- Put your child on their side with their head turned to one side.
- Remove anything in their mouth, like a pacifier or bottle.
- Don't put your fingers or anything else inside their mouth.
- Remove any objects around them so they don't hurt themselves.

Call your child's healthcare provider immediately after the seizure. If the seizure has not stopped after 5 minutes, call 911.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call your child's healthcare provider if:

- Your newborn baby (younger 90 days old) develops a fever.
- Your child has a fever above 104°F.
- Your child's fever does not go down after you give them acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Your child vomits often or with unusual force.
- Your child has a seizure.
- Your child has a stiff neck or won't move their neck.
- Your child looks ill, cries constantly, or seems to be in pain, whether they have a fever or not.
- Your child has trouble drinking fluids or has fewer wet diapers.
- Your child has a low-grade fever (under 101°F or 38.3°C) for more than 48 hours, even if they seem well.

Call 911 or take your child to the emergency room if:

- They are having trouble breathing
- They are unresponsive or too sleepy

Notes
