

Fever without Fear: Information for Parents

Let's face it, fevers can be scary for parents. When your child is burning up, it can be hard to think straight and make important decisions. Learning what causes fevers and how to treat them will ease your anxiety and help you take control of the situation.

What Causes a Fever?

Everyone has his or her own internal "thermostat" that regulates body temperature, and normal body temperature is around 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit plus or minus about one degree (37 degrees Celsius, plus or minus about 0.6 degrees). When the body detects an infection or other illness, the brain responds by raising the body temperature to help fight the condition.

A rectal temperature over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit is considered a fever. It is not always necessary for a child with a fever to see their doctor. It depends on the age of the child and the other symptoms they have.

Managing the Fever

A fever can't always be detected by feeling your child's forehead. It's usually necessary to take his temperature as well. Although there are numerous thermometers on the market that measure temperature in different areas, parents should use rectal thermometers with their babies for the most accurate reading.

Once you've identified a fever, the most important things you can do is to improve your child's comfort and make sure they get enough fluid, so they do not get [dehydrated](#). While you may instinctively want to bring your child to the doctor's office, it may not be necessary, especially if the child seems fine once their discomfort is treated.

In babies 3 months and younger, fevers are serious. Call us if your baby has a temperature of 100.4 F/ 38 C or higher.

Keeping Fever at Bay

Although not every fever needs to be treated, there are some things you can do to help make your child more comfortable.

- Giving a child [acetaminophen](#) or [ibuprofen](#) will usually reduce a fever. It is important to make sure you give [the right dose](#) to your child. Please refer to the proper Tylenol/Ibuprofen dosing handout provided (or available at our office). Do not overdress your child. Other practices to reduce fevers such as an alcohol bath, ice packs, etc. are no longer recommended and can actually have adverse effects on your child.
- A fever will also cause a child to lose fluids more quickly, so offer plenty of [fluids to avoid dehydration](#). Signs of dehydration include crying without tears, a dry mouth, and fewer wet diapers.
- Keep your digital thermometer ready and accessible so you don't have to search for it once your child is ill.

- Have children's acetaminophen or ibuprofen [on hand](#).
- Make sure your pediatrician's phone number is handy.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor right away if your child has a fever and:

- Looks very ill, is unusually drowsy, or is very fussy
- Has been in a very hot place, such as an overheated car
- Has other symptoms, such as a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe ear pain, an unexplained rash, or repeated vomiting or diarrhea
- Has signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth, sunken soft spot or significantly fewer wet diapers and is not able to take in fluids
- Has immune system problems, such as sickle cell disease or cancer, or is taking steroids
- Has had a [seizure](#)
- Is younger than 3 months (12 weeks) and has a temperature of 100.4°F (38.0°C) or higher
- Fever rises above 104°F (40°C) repeatedly for a child of any age

Also call your child's doctor if:

- Your child still "acts sick" once his fever is brought down.
- Your child seems to be getting worse.
- The fever persists for more than 24 hours in a child younger than 2 years.
- The fever persists for more than 3 days (72 hours) in a child 2 years of age or older.

Additional Information on HealthyChildren.org:

- [How to Take a Child's Temperature](#)
- [Fever and Pain Medicine: How Much To Give Your Child](#)
- [Signs and Symptoms of Fever](#)
- [The Healthy Children Show: Fever](#) (Video)
- [The Healthy Children Show: Giving Liquid Medicine Safely](#) (Video)

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The information contained on this website should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.