

**NOTE:** Contact your child's doctor anytime your child has a fever and also:

- Has a chronic health problem.
- Sees a doctor or specialist or needs medicines regularly.
- Is being treated for cancer or another serious health problem.
- Has a problem with their immune system.
- Has had a urinary tract infection (UTI) in the past.

## Fever quick tips

Fever is a common sign of illness in children.

- It is a normal response to an infection caused by bacteria (germ) or a virus. Fever most often goes away when your child's illness goes away.
- It can be controlled with medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. These medicines do not cure the fever or the illness. They only make your child more comfortable.
- Never give your child aspirin or aspirin products, such as baby aspirin, Pepto-Bismol, Goody's, BC powder or Alka Seltzer. Doing so may cause Reye's syndrome, a serious disease.

## What symptoms does fever cause?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Flushed skin
- Increased heart rate
- Increased breathing rate, but is breathing easily and not having trouble breathing

## Should I treat my child's fever?

Some guidelines are listed below for when you may need to call the doctor or treat your child's fever.

### Call the doctor if your child has not yet been checked by a doctor for fever and:

- Is younger than 3 months of age and has a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher rectally. Even a slight fever in a young baby can be a sign of serious illness.
- Is 3 to 24 months of age and has a fever of 102.5°F (39.2°C) or higher rectally.

Rectally means that you take the temperature in the rectum (your child's bottom where stool comes out).

- Put the thermometer into your child's rectum until you cannot see the silver tip.
- Other methods are not as accurate in babies.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Fever, continued

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- An accurate temperature in young babies is very important, especially when a doctor has not seen the baby yet.

For children older than 24 months of age with fever:

- You do not need to give your child medicine for fever unless they are uncomfortable.
- Check your child's activity level to find out if you need to do anything for fever. The illness is probably **not** serious if your child:
  - Is playing like normal.
  - Is drinking like normal.
  - Seems happy and alert.
  - Is breathing easily and has a normal skin color.
  - Looks well when their temperature comes down.

Your child may not feel like eating a lot when they have a fever. This is OK. Be sure they are drinking and urinating (going to the bathroom) like normal. If they are not, call the doctor.

## How do I treat a fever?

Some guidelines for treating fever include:

- Dress your child very lightly. Do not bundle them or cover them with a blanket.
- For children older than 12 months of age, give extra water or cool liquids.
- For babies younger than 12 months of age, avoid giving extra water. Instead, use oral rehydration fluids, such as Lytren, Pedialyte, Liquilyte, Infalyte or a less costly store brand.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand). Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
  - **Do not give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months of age without a doctor's order.**
  - **Do not give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in 24 hours.**
  - If your child has any type of liver problem, talk with the doctor before giving acetaminophen.

### OR

- Give ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) every 6 hours. Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
  - **Do not give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months of age without a doctor's order.**
  - If your child has chickenpox, kidney problems or bleeding problems, talk with the doctor before giving ibuprofen.
  - Give this medicine with food or milk to decrease stomach upset.

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# Fever, continued

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It may take 60 to 90 minutes for these medicines to work.

- Check with your child's doctor or pharmacist before giving acetaminophen or ibuprofen with other medicines. This includes over-the-counter medicines like cough and cold medicines.
- Tell the doctor if your child is taking any vitamins, herbal products, other supplements or home remedies.

## When can my child return to daycare or school?

Keep your child home until they:

- Feel better.
- Have no fever without using medicines for 24 hours.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Does not smile or play for even a few minutes every 4 hours
- Shows signs of dehydration:
  - No urine in 6 hours in a baby younger than 12 months old
  - No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 12 months old
  - No tears when crying
  - Sunken eyes
  - Dry lips and mouth
- Vomits (throws up) more than 2 times
- Is not comfortable, even when held
- Seems to be breathing hard or fast even after the fever has been treated with medicine
- Has a new rash not yet seen by a doctor
- Has fever that lasts more than 3 days
- Has any continued pain, such as earache, pain with urinating or stomach pain
- Has a stiff neck
- Has a headache that does not get better with medicine, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- For a baby younger than 3 months old – has a fever of **100.4°F (38°C) or higher** rectally and has not been checked by a doctor yet **for the fever**.
- For a baby 3 to 24 months old – has a fever of **102.5°F (39.2°C) or higher** rectally and has not been checked by a doctor yet **for the fever**.

Also call if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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