

Fever Control (Child)



A fever is a natural reaction of the body to an illness. A child's fever usually isn't harmful. It helps the body fight infections. A fever often doesn't need to be treated. But it does need to be treated if your child is uncomfortable and looks and acts sick. And a fever needs to be treated in a child who has a long-term (chronic) health condition or has had febrile seizures in the past.

Home care

Keep your child dressed in lightweight clothing. This is to help lose the excess body heat. The fever will go up if you dress your child in extra layers or wrap your child in blankets.

Fever causes the body to lose water. For infants younger than 1 year old, keep giving regular formula or breastfeeding. Between feedings, give oral rehydration solution. You can get this at the grocery store or pharmacy without a prescription. For children 1 year or older, give plenty of fluids. Good fluids include water, diluted fruit juice, gelatin water, electrolyte drinks, soft drinks with no caffeine, ginger ale, lemonade, and frozen fruit pops.

Fever medicines

Watch how your child is acting and feeling. You don't need to give fever medicine if your child is active and alert, and is eating and drinking. You may need to give fever medicine if your child has a long-term (chronic) health condition or has had febrile seizures in the past. Talk with your child's healthcare provider about when to treat your child's fever.

You may give acetaminophen or ibuprofen if your child:

- Becomes less active
- Looks and acts sick
- Isn't sleeping, drinking, or eating as usual
- Has a temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher

Use the dose advised by your child's healthcare provider or the dose listed on the medicine bottle label for your child's age and weight. If your child has chronic liver or kidney disease or ever had a stomach ulcer or gastrointestinal bleeding, talk with the provider before giving your child these medicines.

If your child can't take or keep down oral medicine, ask the pharmacist or provider about fever medicines that can be given as a rectal suppository. You can get these without a prescription.

Ask your child's healthcare provider if you should wake your child to give fever medicine. Sleep is important to help your child get better.

When giving fever medicine to a child with no chronic illness:

- Don't give ibuprofen to a child younger than 6 months old.
- Read the label before giving fever medicine. This is to make sure that you're giving the right dose for your child's age and weight.
- If your child is taking other medicines, check the list of ingredients. Look for acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If so, ask your child's provider before giving your child the medicine. This is to prevent a possible overdose.
- If your child is younger than 2 years, talk with the provider before giving any medicines. They will tell you the right medicine to use and how much to give.

- Don't give aspirin to a child younger than 15 years old who has a fever. Aspirin can cause serious side effects, such as brain and liver damage related to a condition called Reye syndrome.
- Don't give ibuprofen if your child is vomiting a lot and is dehydrated.

Once the fever is under control, keep giving your child either the acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Give the medicine that works best. If either medicine alone doesn't keep the fever down, contact your child's provider.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your child's healthcare provider, or as advised.

When to get medical advice

For a usually healthy infant or child, call your child's healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Fever (see "Fever and children" below)
- Pain that gets worse. A newborn may show pain with crying that can't be soothed.
- Stiff or painful neck, headache, or repeated diarrhea or vomiting.
- Your child is abnormally fussy or drowsy.
- Trouble focusing or paying attention to you
- Rash or purple spots on the skin.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if your child has any of these:

- A fever after being in a very hot place (like an overheated car)
- Trouble breathing
- Confusion
- Feeling drowsy or having trouble waking up
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Fast heart rate
- Seizure
- Stiff neck

Fever and children

Use a digital thermometer to check your child's temperature. Don't use a mercury thermometer. There are different kinds and uses of digital thermometers. They include:

- **Rectal.** For children younger than 3 years, a rectal temperature is the most accurate.
- **Forehead (temporal).** This works for children age 3 months and older. If a child under 3 months old has signs of illness, this can be used for a first pass. The healthcare provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.

- **Ear (tympanic).** Ear temperatures are accurate after 6 months of age, but not before.
- **Armpit (axillary).** This is the least reliable but may be used for a first pass to check a child of any age with signs of illness. The provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.
- **Mouth (oral).** Don't use a thermometer in your child's mouth until they're at least 4 years old.

Use the rectal thermometer with care. Follow the product maker's directions for correct use. Insert it gently. Label it and make sure it's not used in the mouth. It may pass on germs from the stool. If you don't feel OK using a rectal thermometer, ask the healthcare provider what type to use instead. When you talk with any healthcare provider about your child's fever, tell them which type you used.

Below are guidelines to know if your young child has a fever. Your child's healthcare provider may give you different numbers for your child. Follow your provider's specific instructions.

Fever readings for a baby under 3 months old:

- First, ask your child's healthcare provider how you should take the temperature.
- Rectal or forehead: 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Armpit: 99°F (37.2°C) or higher

Fever readings for a child age 3 months to 36 months (3 years):

- Rectal, forehead, or ear: 102°F (38.9°C) or higher
- Armpit: 101°F (38.3°C) or higher

Call the healthcare provider in these cases:

- Repeated temperature of 104°F (40°C) or higher in a child of any age
- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher in baby younger than 3 months
- Fever that lasts more than 24 hours in a child under age 2
- Fever that lasts for 3 days in a child age 2 or older

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