

# Discharge Instructions for Cellulitis (Child)



Your child was diagnosed with cellulitis. This is an infection that first affects outer layers of skin. It then may spread more deeply into tissues under the skin. Cellulitis is caused by bacteria. Bacteria can get into the body through broken skin, such as a cut, scratch, sore, or animal bite. Or it can enter the body through a rash that makes a break in the skin. Your child may have been treated in the hospital with IV (intravenous) antibiotics. These antibiotics will often be continued by mouth at home. Below are instructions for caring for your child at home.

## Home care

- Raise your child's infected area if possible. This will help keep the swelling down.
- Wash your hands before and after touching any cuts, scratches, or bandages to prevent infections.
- Keep the infected area clean.
- If advised, apply clean bandages or gauze dressings as directed by your child's healthcare provider.
- Be sure your child finishes all the medicine that was prescribed. If your child doesn't finish the medicine, the infection may return. Not finishing the medicine can also make any future infections harder to treat.
- Give your child a pain reliever as directed by the provider. Ask if an over-the-counter pain reliever is appropriate. Also ask for instructions on the right dose for your child's age and weight. Never give children aspirin.
- If your child feels warm or seems feverish, take your child's temperature (see Fever and children below). Tell your child's healthcare provider exactly where you measured the temperature (mouth, rectum, or under the arm).

## Follow-up

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your child's healthcare provider.

## When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call your child's healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- Trouble or pain when moving the joints above or below the infected area
- Discharge or pus draining from the area
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your child's provider (See Fever and children, below)
- Shaking chills
- Pain or redness that gets worse in or around the infected area, especially if the area of redness gets larger or approaches the eyes
- Swelling in the infected area
- Vomiting

## 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 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 are 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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