

Fever

What is it?

Your child has been diagnosed with a fever. Fever is the body's natural response to an infection. It is nature's way of fighting back to kill the germs that have caused the infection. Most infections in children are caused by viruses such as the cold virus, stomach virus or the flu. Fever from these infections goes away naturally in three to five days without the need for any prescription medications. Bacteria cause some infections such as strep throat, urine infections and ear infections. We use antibiotics to treat bacterial infections only. Antibiotics are of no value at all for viral infections.

A normal child has a temperature between 96 degrees and 100 degrees; the average body temperature in humans is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Fever in a child is a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees measured either in the mouth or in the rectum. Ear thermometers, forehead thermometers and under-the-arm thermometers are not accurate; we do not recommend them.

When a doctor cares for someone with a fever, they ask careful questions about the illness and do a detailed physical exam. The main goal is to find out if a bacterial infection is the cause of the fever. In most cases the doctor does not find any evidence of a bacterial infection, which means the fever must be coming from a virus. Viral infections generally are nuisances that go away by themselves and rarely require hospitalization. In some cases, bacterial infections can be serious enough to require overnight admission to the hospital.

There are several facts about fever that all parents should know:

- Fever by itself does not cause brain damage
- The cause of the fever is more important than how high the temperature is. A doctor tries to decide if it is coming from a viral infection (cold, flu) or a bacterial infection (strep throat, ear infection) because we can cure bacterial infections with antibiotics. Antibiotics do not cure viral infections.
- A higher fever makes your child feel more uncomfortable than a lower fever, but other than that higher fevers should not cause extra alarm
- About five to 10 percent of children may have a short "fever seizure" due to the fever. These seizures are frightening to watch, but they cause no damage to the brain. If your child has a fever seizure, see your doctor or go to the emergency department.

How is it treated?

Fever can be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil). The dose depends on the weight of the child and the product that you buy. In general, the products on the market include:

Infant Tylenol drops: 80 mg/0.8cc (one dropper)

Children's Tylenol syrup: 160 mg/5cc (one teaspoon)

Tylenol tablets: 325 mg

Infant Motrin drops: 40 mg/one cc

Motrin liquid: 100 mg/5cc

Motrin Tablets: 200 mg/tablet (some also come in 400 mg or 600 mg strength)

Dose for your child: _____

What to Watch For:

Most fevers from viruses go away naturally after three to five days. Fevers from bacterial infections go away after 1-3 days on appropriate antibiotics. These are some things to watch for:

- Fever that lasts more than 5 days with a viral infection (cold, flu)
- Fever that persists despite 2-3 days of antibiotics
- Inability to drink any liquids
- Little to no urine output in 8-12 hours
- Inability to stand without support
- Severe headache with or without stiff neck
- Breathing problems
- Purple rash on the skin
- Severe belly pain or chest pain
- Fever seizure
- Significant worsening of overall condition

Contact your doctor if any of these symptoms develop.