

FEVER FACTS

A child's elevated body temperature, or fever, is a common cause of worry for parents. While fever is a sign of illness, it is not always serious. The following facts will help you manage your child's fever.

- Fever is often a sign of infection – raising the internal temperature is the body's way of fighting infection and is beneficial.
- The height of a fever is not related to the severity of the illness. That is, high fever does not always indicate a serious illness nor does a low fever always signify a minor illness.
- The response to fever-reducing medicine is not related to the severity of the illness. Medicine may only bring the temperature down by one or two degrees.
- Fever is defined as a rectal temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and higher. Axillary (armpit) measurements may not be reliable and oral measurements are inaccurate unless the child can keep his mouth closed for at least 3 minutes. Fever strips are not accurate and should not be used. Tympanic (ear) thermometer should be used only for children older than 6 months. Temporal artery thermometers are a good choice.
- Parents must know how to take their child's temperature. Our nurses are happy to teach you if necessary. Be sure to practice when your child is well!
- Teething is not a cause of fever.
- Fever itself is not harmful to the body unless over 107-108 degrees F.

FEVER AS A SIGN OF ILLNESS

Since fever is often a sign of infection, it may require a visit to the pediatrician. If no severe or treatable infection is revealed by examination, then fever can be reasonably attributed to one of many viral illnesses. Observation and symptomatic treatment may be all that is necessary. In the event of a more severe infection, further testing or even hospitalization may be required.

Fever in infants less than three months of age always warrants a call to the pediatrician's office.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

- Any fever in a baby less than 3 months of age
- Any fever of 105 F or over at any age
- Any fever that persists more than 48-72 hours
- Any child who has particular signs of sickness with fever such as pain, persistent vomiting, breathing trouble, trouble with urination, rash or bloody diarrhea
- When you are worried about your child, unsure or confused, or see any other sign which you feel should be reported

TREATING FEVER

Sometimes an infant or child will have a fever and seem bright and happy; in that case temperature reduction is not necessary. If the child is cranky or listless, reducing the fever may help the child feel better. Remember that extra fluids will be important. Do not bundle your child. Clothe him lightly instead.

To treat fever we recommend acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) but not aspirin. (See dosage charts). Be sure to administer the proper amount. Sponging with lukewarm or tepid water will also bring temporary fever relief. Sponging without medication will result in only very brief fever reduction – the temperature will rise again when the bath is over. Sponging is generally not necessary for fevers under 104. Never give cold baths or enemas which cause shivering and drive the temperature up instead of down. Alcohol baths are dangerous and should be avoided. Give plenty of fluids, enough so the child passes urine freely.

Aspirin is no longer recommended to treat fever since its use during certain infections can lead to Reyes' Syndrome, a severe and sometimes fatal illness.

Remember that all medicines have side effects and should be used carefully and only when necessary. Keep all medicines in locked or inaccessible cabinets. Overdoses of aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen can be fatal. In proper doses, acetaminophen and ibuprofen reduce fever equally well. Acetaminophen lasts four hours while ibuprofen lasts six to eight hours.