

Childhood Fevers

In the next few years it is likely your child will have fevers on at least a few occasions. We hope this addresses some of your concerns and questions about fevers in children.

Why do children get fevers?

Fevers in children are usually due to infections. There is good evidence that the fever is part of the body's immune response to an infection and helps to fight off the illness. With most common (viral) infections the fever lasts 2-4 days, though sometimes it can be as long as a week.

What is a fever?

During the course of the day a child's temperature will normally fluctuate between 98° and 100.4° Fahrenheit. We define a fever as a temperature of 100.5° F (38° C) or higher. A higher fever does not always indicate a more severe illness.

How should I measure my child's temperature?

In general, how you measure your child's temperature is not important as long as you measure it in a consistent manner. For babies 6 months and younger the only reliable measurement is done rectally. In older children, oral temperatures tend to be more consistent than axillary. The newer thermometers that measure temperatures in the ear or on the forehead are fine, though they tend to overestimate the temperature and will often produce very different results if the temperature is measured repeatedly. When you call the office to discuss a fever, please take your baby's temperature before you call and let us know the result, and how you took the temperature, without adding or subtracting anything to adjust for the method you took it.

Will the fever harm him/her?

No, fever is a symptom, not a disease. The body will not produce a fever that will harm a child. Temperatures of 104-105° happen commonly in children and do not cause any physical damage. (High temperatures caused by an external source of heat, such as being locked in a car on a hot day, can be harmful.)

Should I treat the fever?

The purpose of treating a fever is to make the child comfortable. If your child is warm and fussy or uncomfortable, reducing the fever should make them feel better. If your child is warm but otherwise happy and playing normally, the fever does not need to be treated.

How do I treat the fever?

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is the medicine of choice to reduce a child's fever. The dose is based on the child's weight, roughly 160 mg per 20 lbs. Tylenol comes in many different formulations, so check the container to determine the strength and proper dosage. Tylenol may be given every 4 hours as needed. If the Tylenol does not seem to reduce the fever you may try Ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) at a dose of 100 mg per 20 lbs. every 6-8 hours. Using Tylenol, Advil or Motrin will often not bring the temperature down into the "normal" range. As long as your child feels cooler and feels better (more active, alert) the medicine has worked. Once you have determined your child has a fever it is not necessary to continue taking the temperature on a regular basis. You can rely on how he/she feels and behaves to determine if the medicine is working and when it is time to give the medicine again.

When should I call the office?

Please call us if:

1. Your infant is less than two months old.
2. Your child has a fever that does not respond to Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen.
3. Your child does not feel better when the fever is reduced.
4. Your child's fever persists for more than 72 hours.
5. Your child is not responding to people and things around him/her. Even with a fever, most children are happy, smiling and playful.