

How to help when a child has a fever

Having a sick child is never easy. Some illnesses may require a trip to a doctor or a hospital. Other illnesses can be treated best at home. To help you care for your child in the right place, we've created this kit.

It contains:

- A digital thermometer
- A dosage chart for infants and children
- A dosing syringe

What is a fever?

A fever is an increase in the body's normal temperature. In most children, normal body temperature is between 97.4 and 100.2 degrees Fahrenheit (36.3 and 37.9 degrees Celsius). Fevers may last for a short, specific period of time, or they may return occasionally over a longer period. Fevers tell the body its immune system needs to fight bacteria and viruses. Even though fevers can be upsetting, they may actually help the body heal.

Does your child have a fever?

To determine if your child has a fever, you will need to take a correct temperature reading. There are three ways to measure true temperature. You can take the oral temperature, the underarm (axillary) temperature or the rectal temperature. Talk to your child's doctor to see which method is best for you.

Take an oral temperature: (best for older, more cooperative children)

1. Place the thermometer beneath your child's tongue.
2. Have your child close his or her lips around the thermometer.
3. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
4. Remove the thermometer from your child's mouth.
5. Read the digital display.
6. Normal oral temperature is between 97.4° F and 100.2° F.
7. Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse it before putting it away.

Take an underarm (axillary) temperature:

1. Hold your child's elbow.
2. Gently lift your child's arm away from his or her side.
3. Place the tip of the thermometer in your child's armpit.
4. Be sure that all sides of the thermometer directly touch your child's skin.
5. Lower the arm over the thermometer.
6. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
7. Take the thermometer from under the arm.
8. Read the digital display.
9. Normal underarm temperature ranges from 97.4° F to 99.4° F.
10. Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse it before putting it away.

Take a rectal temperature:

1. Place a small amount of petroleum jelly on the tip of the thermometer.
2. Lay your child on his or her back on a firm surface, or place your baby face down on your lap.
3. Hold the child securely to prevent moving.
4. If the child is lying on his back, hold his ankles and lift both legs, as if you were changing a diaper.
5. Use one hand to part the baby's bottom; use the other hand to hold the thermometer.
6. Gently slip the tip of the thermometer ¼-inch to ½-inch into the rectum. Never slide the thermometer further than that.
7. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
8. Remove the thermometer.
9. Read the digital display.
10. Normal rectal temperature is between 97.4° F and 100.2° F.
11. Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse it before putting it away.

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What to do if your child has a fever

By treating fevers, you can help your child be comfortable enough to drink fluids and be more active. Follow these steps to lower a fever and to help your child feel better faster:

Try home remedies.

Offer liquids. Fevers tend to take away needed water from our bodies. Without the right amount of water, our body temperature gets even higher. Offer your child plenty of liquid to help reduce a fever, but give it in small amounts, especially if the child has an upset stomach.

Know your child's perceived body temperature. If children are old enough to choose their clothing, let them be the judge of what to wear. If they are too young to choose clothing and make adjustments as they feel hot or cold, watch for noticeable body temperature signs. If your child is sweating or flushed, remove some clothing and blankets. If your child is shivering and looks pale, add some clothes and blankets.

Give your child a lukewarm sponge bath. Place your child in a bathtub and sponge him or her with lukewarm water. If the child is uncomfortable or is shivering, stop the sponge bath and take him or her out of the bath.

Try over-the-counter medications.

Tylenol® (or its generic equivalent, acetaminophen) and Motrin® (or its generic equivalent, ibuprofen) are over-the-counter medicines that can help reduce a fever. Use the dosage chart provided in this kit or read package labels to know how much medicine to give, based on your child's age and weight. If your child is less than 2 years old, consult a doctor or pharmacist before giving any medicines.

Give medicine when your child is awake. There is no need to wake a sleeping child to give him or her medicine. Do not use acetaminophen and ibuprofen together. Dosing errors occur more often when both are used. Use only one medication unless your doctor recommends that you use both.

Know when to call your child's doctor.

A fever itself will not harm your child and does not necessarily require treatment. However, there are times when your child should see a doctor. Call your child's doctor if:

- Your child is less than 3 months old and has a temperature of 100.2 or higher
- Your child is lethargic (limp and sleepy) and/or more irritable than normal
- Your child's fever has lasted for three or more days
- Your child has a fever AND a sore throat, ear pain, abdominal pain, headache, stiff neck, rash, or pain when urinating
- Your child is drinking less than usual and, in the past 24 hours, has had fewer than four wet diapers or has urinated less than twice
- Your child is having trouble breathing, with or without a fever

Additional resources

If you are a Providence Health Plan member, call the 24-hour RN Medical Advice Line for confidential medical advice. The telephone number is on the back of your member identification card. When you call, provide your member identification number, located on the front of your member identification card.

If you are not a Providence Health Plan member, you can find general medical information at www.providence.org/healthlibrary.