

Fever in Infants and Children

What is a Fever?

A fever is a body temperature that is higher than normal. Most doctors agree that anything over 38°C or 100.4°F is a fever.

Your child may feel warm, shiver, or look flushed. You will need to take your child's temperature to know for sure.

Fever is not a sickness. It is a sign (symptom) of sickness. It can be caused by lots of things like a cold, the flu, or an ear infection. Look for other symptoms to figure out what is causing your child's fever.

Fever is a sign that your child is fighting an infection. It is usually harmless. Your child's fever should go away in about 3 days. If it doesn't, call your child's doctor.

Call the Doctor Right Away If...

...your child

- Is 2 months or younger and has a fever, OR
- Has a high fever, over 39.4°C (103°F), OR
- Has a fever for more than 3 days.

You also should call the doctor if your child has a fever and any of these signs:

- Looks very sick, is very sleepy, or very fussy
- Has other symptoms, like a stiff neck, rash, headache, sore throat, ear pain, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Has had a seizure
- Has had a sickle cell disease, cancer, or any disease that makes it hard to fight infections

What to Do

To help your child feel better,

- Comfort your child
- Give your child water, juice mixed with water, or an electrolyte drink for children. Breast milk is fine for nursing babies
- Help your child rest if he or she feels tired
- Cool your child down if the fever is over 38.3°C or 101°F. (See "Tips to Cool Down a Fever")

What Not to Do

- Don't give your child aspirin. It's dangerous for children younger than 18 years.
- Don't rub or bathe your child with rubbing alcohol. It can make children sick.
- Don't make your child cold enough to shiver. Shivering warms the body up more.



Tips to Cool Down a Fever

Give your child medicine to bring down the fever:

- For a baby 6 months or younger, give paracetamol (also called acetaminophen)
- For a baby or child older than 6 months, give either paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Both of these medicines help with fever. But they are not the same. Be sure to get the right kind of medicine for your child's age. Follow what the label says. Ask your doctor how much to give if your child is younger than 2 years.

Give your child a bath.

Try this if the fever is 40°C (104°F) or higher, and your child can't take fever medicine. The water should be cooler than your child is, but still warm (lukewarm). Sponge the water over your child's body (5 or 10 minutes is enough). If your child starts to shiver during the bath, then the water is too cold. And shivering can make a fever worse. Take your child out of the bath if he or she shivers.

What to Do for a Seizure

Fever can cause a seizure in some young children. Seizures are scary, but usually harmless. Your child may look strange, shake, then stiff and twitch. His or her eyes may roll.

If this happens:

- Lay your child down on the floor or a bed.
- Turn your child's head to the side. That way, spit or vomit can drain out.
- Don't put anything in your child's mouth.
- Call the doctor. The doctor should always check your child after a seizure.

Reference: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008.