

Fever



What is a fever?

A fever is a rise in body temperature that is above normal. Fevers are common in young children and are most often a sign that the body is fighting an infection. Usually a fever is not harmful, and it may help your child fight an illness.

How do I know if my child has a fever?

If your child's forehead, chest or face feels warm you can take your child's temperature using a thermometer. Normal body temperature is about 98.6° F. A temperature higher than 100° F (38° C), taken under the arm, is usually considered a fever.



How do I take my child's temperature?

Electric, digital thermometers are most often used because they are accurate, low-cost, and easy to use.

Temperatures can be taken:

- *In the armpit* (under the arm)—recommended for infants and toddlers.
- *By mouth* (under the tongue)—okay for children older than 4 years.
- *Rectally* (in the bottom) recommended for infants under 3 months.

Temperature strips and pacifier thermometers are not recommended because they are less accurate. Mercury glass thermometers should not be used because they are breakable and the mercury is toxic.

How do I manage my child's fever?

Without medication:

A child with a fever, who is active and playful, usually does not require medication. Instead, focus on keeping your child comfortable:

- Dress your child in light weight clothing; do not overdress.
- Keep the room at a temperature that is not too hot or cold.
- Give extra fluids to prevent dehydration.

With medication:

Fever reducing medication is sometimes given to help a child feel more comfortable, and/or when a fever is very high. Check with your child's health care provider before giving medications such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol®/Tempra®) or Ibuprofen (Motrin®/Advil®)*. Always give medication according to instructions and use the measuring device that comes with the medication. *Don't give your child aspirin because of its association with Reye's syndrome.* Keep all medications out of children's reach.

When should I call a health care provider?

High or rapidly rising fevers can be a sign of a serious infection. Depending on your child's age, behavior, and other symptoms, you may need to seek medical help. Call your child's doctor if:

- Your child under 3 months has any fever, call your baby's health care provider immediately.
- Your child between 3 and 6 months has a fever above 101° F.
- Your child over 6 months has a fever above 103° F.
- Your child's fever lasts more than a few days.
- Your child has a fever and is not eating or playing or is having difficulty breathing.
- Your child has a stiff neck or rash.
- Your child has other signs of illness such as persistent diarrhea or vomiting, a cough or a severe sore throat.
- Your child has a seizure.
- Your child seems very sick or you have a question about your child's fever and are not sure what to do.

*The California Childcare Health Program does not endorse or promote any commercial products.