

# Caring for Your Child's Fever

## What is a child's normal body temperature?

A child has the same body temperature range as an adult:

- 36.5°C – 37.5°C (97.7°F - 99.5°F) when taken by mouth.
- 36°C – 37.3°C (96.8°F - 99°F) when taken under an armpit.
- 36.6°C - 37.9°C (97.9°F – 100.2°F) when taken rectally.

## What is a fever?

- **A fever is a symptom and not a disease.** It is the body's natural way to fight infections and results in a raised body temperature.
- Causes of fevers may include:
  - Viral infections such as influenza and parvovirus ('fifth disease').
  - Bacterial infections such as urinary tract infections and pneumonia.
  - Immunizations. Fevers may occur 1 to 14 days after a child or adult gets immunized, depending on the types of vaccines they received.

## How can I tell if my child has a fever?

- Safe and accurate temperature taking is important especially in young children. Electronic digital thermometers are recommended for use.

### By armpit:

- Place the thermometer high up in the centre of the armpit making sure it touches bare skin on all sides.
- Hold the child's arm close to his/her body.
- When the thermometer beeps, remove it gently and read the temperature.

### By mouth (can be used for older children):

- Place the thermometer probe under their tongue (remind the child not to bite down on the thermometer).
- When the thermometer beeps, remove it gently and read the temperature.
- Wait 20 minutes after your child has a drink before taking their temperature by mouth.

### Rectally:

- Apply a lubricant or petroleum jelly (like Vaseline®) on the thermometer probe so that you can easily insert it.

- Lay the child down and spread their buttocks with one hand and gently insert the thermometer probe into the rectum about 1.25 cm (0.5 in.) to 2.5 cm (1 in.). Don't force it into the rectum.
- Hold the thermometer in place with your fingers and press the child's buttocks together to keep the thermometer in place.
- When the thermometer beeps, remove it gently and read the temperature.
- Wash the thermometer well after rectal use. To prevent spreading bacteria, don't use it to take oral temperatures.

### Notes:

- Ear (tympanic) thermometers are quick but the result may not be accurate.
- Forehead strips, pacifier (soother) and disposable thermometers are not accurate and should not be used.
- Glass thermometers can cause mercury poisoning if they break.

## When should I be concerned about my child's fever?

**Take your child to a doctor, nurse practitioner or emergency room immediately if they have any of these symptoms:**

- A fever over 38°C (100.4°F) **and** is less than 6 months of age.
- Has had a fever **for more than 3 days**.
- Develops small purple spots on his/her skin that may look like bruises or a rash.
- Has a seizure or convulsion ('a fit' or shaking) whether or not they have a fever.
- Struggles with you, seems confused or delirious, is unresponsive or you have difficulty waking your child.
- Has problems breathing.
- His/her skin colour does not look right or becomes grey, pale or blue.
- Refuses to stand or put weight on his/her legs.
- Cries constantly and you cannot settle him/her.
- Does not use an arm or leg normally.
- Has repeated vomiting and/or diarrhea even if they don't look like they are dehydrated.
- Cries when going to the bathroom, or if his/her pee smells bad.

## How can I treat my child's fever?

### Comfort measures include:

- Dressing your child lightly and covering with a sheet.
- Bathing your child in lukewarm (never cold) water for less than 15 minutes (stop the bath if your child starts shivering).
- Encourage your infant to breastfeed or formula feed as often as possible to prevent dehydration (infants do not need to be given additional water or other fluids).
- Encourage your child to drink water or diluted juice or eat popsicles, gelatin and ice chips, and watch for signs of dehydration (e.g., their pee is dark colored or they are thirstier than usual).

### Medication to manage fevers:

- **ASA (Aspirin®) should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye's syndrome**
- **Do not give ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) to infants less than 6 months old.**
- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®) is effective for fever and pain control.** It is available in several forms such as drops, syrup, tablets/chews or rectal suppositories. .

- Carefully read and follow all labels on the medicine bottle and package.
- **Always check your child's weight** so that they receive the right dosage of medication.
- Doses may be repeated every 4-6 hours until the fever drops. **Do not give your child more than 5 doses in a 24 hour period.**
- **Acetaminophen may be present in other over-the-counter medications.** Overdoses of acetaminophen have been known to cause permanent liver damage and/or death in children and adults.
- **Do not alternate giving acetaminophen and ibuprofen** as this does not control a fever or pain any better than just giving acetaminophen and may cause accidental drug overdoses.

**For more information, contact HealthLine at 811 (24 hours a day), your local public health office, or your physician or nurse practitioner.**

Resources: <http://healthlineonline.ca/>; Canadian Pediatric Society [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca); The Hospital for Sick Children (2010) [www.sickkids.ca](http://www.sickkids.ca); [www.tylenol.ca](http://www.tylenol.ca) (2014); <http://www.metric-conversions.org/temperature/celsius-to-fahrenheit.htm>

**Dosages for Various Forms of Acetaminophen for Children**

Weight (kg)	Weight (lbs.)	Single dose (mg)	Infant drops 80 mg per 1mL	Children's syrup 160 mg per 5mL	Children's meltable or chewable tablets 80 mg per tablet	Junior meltable or chewable tablets 160 mg per tablet	Suppository 120 mg
2.5-5.4	6-11	40 mg	0.5 mL	-	-	-	-
5.5-7.9	12-17	80 mg	1 mL	-	-	-	-
8-10.9	18-23	120 mg	1.5 mL	-	1.5 tablets	-	1 suppository
11-15.9	24-35	160 mg	2 mL	1 tsp. (5 mL)	2 tablets	1 tablet	-
16-21.9	36-47	240 mg	-	1.5 tsp. (7.5 mL)	3 tablets	1.5 tablets	2 suppositories