

Facts about Fever

Fever is very common in children. It is usually caused by an infection, but it may also be caused by some other illness.

Parents cannot tell how serious an illness is by how high the fever is. A child with a mild infection could have a very high fever, while a child with a very severe infection might have no fever at all. The way a child acts or behaves is a more important sign. **If you're worried by your child's behaviour, call your doctor.**

Check for fever by taking the child's temperature in the mouth, ear or under the arm. (See "How to Take a Temperature"). A child has a fever when the temperature is 38.5°C or higher.

How to Bring Down a Fever

The following steps can help bring a fever down and make the child more comfortable:

- Keep clothing light such as a T-shirt and shorts or diaper, and keep room below 22°C.
- If the child has a temperature of 38.5°C or higher, sponge baths with a washcloth soaked in cool, not cold, water can help reduce the fever. Check temperature every 4 hours.
- Offer your child plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen may be given up to 5 times in 24 hours.



When to Call Your Doctor or 811

Call your doctor if your child:

- has a fever and is less than 6 months old
- has a fever for more than 72 hours
- is excessively cranky, fussy or irritable
- is unusually sleepy, listless or does not respond
- has difficulty breathing
- has a fever and a rash or any other signs of illness that concern you

How to Take a Temperature

There are 3 ways to take a temperature:

- 1** In the mouth **2** Under the armpit **3** In the ear

The right method for children depends on the child's age. For older children and teenagers, use the adult method. Write the temperature down so you can tell the doctor.

The following chart will help you decide which method to use.

AGE	BEST METHOD	SECOND BEST METHOD	THIRD BEST METHOD
Birth to 2 years of age	Armpit	—	—
2 to 5 years of age	Ear	Armpit	—
5 years - Adult	Mouth	Ear	Armpit

Taking a temperature by mouth

- Place the tip of thermometer under tongue and close mouth.
- Do not bite down on the thermometer.
- Do not let a child drink any hot or cold liquids for half an hour prior to taking a temperature.

Taking a temperature in the armpit

- Place the tip of the thermometer against the skin and hold the arm snugly against chest for 5 minutes or until the thermometer beeps.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™) or ibuprofen (Advil™, Motrin™) may help reduce a fever and provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package about how much and how often to take acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Never give products containing ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, such as Aspirin™) to anyone under the age of 20 years. Use of ASA products by children can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the brain and liver.

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Taking a temperature in the ear

An ear thermometer may give a temperature reading that is lower than your child's actual temperature.

- Use a clean probe tip each time and follow the manufacturer's instructions very carefully.
- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it back and up. This will straighten the ear canal and make a clear path on the inside of the ear to the eardrum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold the button down for one second.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

If you don't have a thermometer

You can tell if someone has a fever by touching his or her skin. They may have a fever if:

- the person's skin is hot and dry
- they have the "chills"
- mouth and lips are dry
- cheeks are flushed

Thermometers

There are several types of thermometer. Digital thermometers are made of unbreakable plastic and measure temperatures quickly. They display the temperature so it is easy to read.

If you have any questions when you buy a thermometer, ask the pharmacist, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

What are febrile (fever) seizures?

A febrile seizure is a convulsion in a child caused by a rapid rise of body temperature. Most seizures occur within the first day of the child becoming sick and not always when the fever is the highest. Sometimes the seizure is the first sign of a fever in an infant or child.

Signs that your child may be having a febrile seizure

Your child may:

- experience sudden stiffness of the muscles of the face, arms or legs
- cry or moan
- have eyes roll back
- fall if standing and may pass urine and/or stools
- vomit or bite their tongue
- stop breathing and may begin to turn blue
- begin to have jerky movements, moving arms and/or legs on both sides of the body
- not respond to voice or touch

What to do if your child has a febrile seizure

- Stay calm.
- Leave the child on the floor (you may want to slip a blanket under the child if the floor is hard).
- Loosen tight clothing, especially around the neck.
- Move the child only if he or she is in a dangerous location.
- Turn the child on her or his side or stomach to protect the head and to prevent the child from choking, if he or she vomits.
- Don't hold the child down.
- Don't force anything into the mouth as this increases the risk of injury. Observe closely and time the seizure, so you can tell the doctor what happened.



Seek medical care

- If the seizure lasts longer than 3 minutes or if a second seizure occurs, call 911 to have an ambulance take your child to the hospital.
- If your child stops breathing, call 911 to have an ambulance take your child to the hospital.
- If the seizure ends quickly, take your child to your family doctor or to the emergency department.
- A doctor should see children as soon as possible after their first febrile seizure or if there are repeated seizures during the same illness.

Preventing further febrile seizures

If your child has a history of febrile seizures and has a fever:

- Give your child acetaminophen at the first sign of fever (you may want to have acetaminophen suppositories on hand).
- Sponge or bathe your child in lukewarm water. You may want to apply cool washcloths to the forehead and neck.
- Offer your child cool drinks.



When the fever is gone and your child feels well enough to take part in activities, he or she can go to school or the child care centre.