

Fever in Children

- Fever is when the temperature of the body rises to above 38°C. A normal temperature range for a child is usually up to 38°C.
- Fever is usually a sign of infection in the body. Fever is often caused by a virus and sometimes by bacteria. Viral infections are far more common and do not need antibiotics. Antibiotics do not cure viruses. Only bacterial infections are treated with antibiotics.
- A high fever does not necessarily mean your child has a serious illness. The fever seen in common childhood infections is not harmful, and in fact it helps the body's immune system fight off the infection.
- There is no advantage to lowering your child's fever, except for comfort.
- Treat your child by making them more comfortable; give clear fluids (e.g. water, diluted fruit juice) and paracetamol if the fever is making your child miserable.
- Fever is a way the body fights infection, and your child's temperature will return to normal when the infection has completely gone.
- Fever is not known to cause damage to the brain or other organs.
- If your child seems well and is happy, there is no need to treat a fever with paracetamol.
- Paracetamol can be given every four hours as directed on the bottle. No more than four doses should be given in each 24-hour period. Do not give for more than two days without seeing your doctor.

Taking your child's temperature

You may want to take your child's temperature if they are:

- unwell and feel hot;
- irritable, crying;
- sleepier than usual;
- vomiting or refusing to drink;
- in pain.

There are three ways to take a child's temperature

1. Under the arm - for all children.
2. Under the tongue - only for older children.
3. Ear (tympanic) - for children of all ages. A tympanic thermometer can be difficult to use and may not be accurate.

Treatment

See your doctor if your child has the following symptoms with their fever:

- complaining of a stiff neck or light hurting their eyes;
- vomiting and refusing to drink much;
- a rash;

- sleepier than usual;
- problems with breathing;
- or if your child is in pain.

Also see your doctor if your child is under three months of age and has a fever.

Febrile convulsions

A few children can have convulsions (a 'fit') when they have a fever. This may happen if your child's temperature goes up suddenly. Sometimes, a convulsion happens when parents don't actually know their child has a fever. Febrile convulsions are not common and do not usually cause any long term health effects.

At home care

Treat your child at home by making them more comfortable.

- Dress your child in enough clothing so that they are not shivering.
- Tepid sponging (sponging with slightly warm water) and fanning children with fevers is not recommended.
- Give your child frequent small drinks of clear fluid (e.g. water, diluted fruit juice, cordial). If your child is less than six months old give extra breastfeeds, cooled boiled water or bottles.
- Do not worry if your child refuses to eat at this time.
- Watch your child for signs that their illness is getting worse.

Key points to remember

- The normal temperature range is up to 38°C.
- Fevers are common in children.
- If your child seems well and is happy there is no need to treat a fever.
- If your child is under three months and has a fever above 38° C, take them to the doctor to be checked.
- If your child is miserable, treatment is needed to comfort your child. Give clear fluids and paracetamol. The response of the fever to treatment does not matter.
- Watch your child for signs of the illness getting worse.

Disclaimer

This information is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your doctor or healthcare professionals. The Pines Family Practice accepts no responsibility for any inaccuracies, information perceived as misleading, or the success of any treatment regimen detailed in this handout.