



# Fever

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Fever is usually, but not always, an indication of some infection in the body. It is the body's first line of defense in fighting infection.

Everyone has his or her own internal "thermostat" that regulates body temperature, and normal body temperature is around 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit plus or minus about one degree (37 degrees Celsius, plus or minus about 0.6 degrees). When the body detects an infection or other illness, the brain responds by raising the body temperature to help fight the condition.

Any rectal temperature over 100.4 is generally considered a fever. A fever itself doesn't necessarily warrant a call to the doctor. It depends on the age of the child and his other symptoms.

## Keeping Your Child Comfortable

Although not every fever needs to be treated, there are some things you can do to help make your child more comfortable. Giving a child acetaminophen or ibuprofen will usually reduce a fever. Make sure you're giving the appropriate dose. Refer to the label and if they're under two years old, contact your pediatrician or pharmacist. Don't bundle or overdress your child.

A fever will also cause a child to lose fluids more quickly, so offer your child plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Signs of dehydration include crying without tears, a dry mouth, a sunken soft spot, and decreased urination.

## When to Call the Doctor

- Your child is younger than 2 to 4 months old and has a fever.
- Your child is lethargic, unresponsive, refuses to eat, has a rash, or is having difficulty breathing.
- You observe signs of dehydration.
- Your child's fever lasts more than 3 days.
- Your child experiences a febrile seizure

## Febrile Seizures

A febrile seizure is a relatively common and harmless side effect of fevers in young children. It's a full-body seizure where your child may be unresponsive, look strange, twitch, stiffen or roll his eyes. Remain calm and move your child to a safe place where he can't hurt himself. Do not put anything in his mouth. Febrile seizures usually last less than one minute, but can last up to 15

minutes. Call 911 if the seizure lasts longer than a few minutes. Follow up with your pediatrician for all febrile seizures.

## Best Ways to Take a Temperature

The American Academy of Pediatrics no longer recommends mercury thermometers because these glass thermometers may break and, as their mercury vaporizes, it can be inhaled, resulting in toxic levels. Digital electronic thermometers are better choices.

- **Digital devices** can measure temperatures in your child’s mouth or rectum. As with any device, some digital thermometers are more accurate than others.
- **Ear thermometers** are another acceptable choice. Their accuracy depends on the ability of the beam emitted by the device to reach the eardrum. Thus, some of these devices may not be as reliable because of earwax or a small curved ear canal. For that reason, most pediatricians prefer that parents use digital electronic thermometers.

Whatever approach you use, clean the thermometer with lukewarm soapy water or rubbing alcohol before each use, and then rinse with cool water.

- To take the temperature in your child’s bottom (rectally), turn on the digital thermometer and then put a small amount of lubricant, such as petroleum jelly, on the small end of it. Place your child across your lap or on something firm, either faceup or facedown (if he’s facedown, put one hand on his back; if he’s faceup, bend your child’s leg to his chest, resting your free hand on the back of his thighs). Then gently insert the small end of the thermometer in your child’s bottom (or rectum), putting it in about 1/2 inch to 1 inch. Hold the thermometer in place for about one minute, or until the device signals that it’s done (by beeping or lighting up). Remove it and read the number. Taking a rectal or oral temperature is more accurate than taking it under your child’s arm. Also, use one digital thermometer labeled “oral,” and another one labeled “rectal.” Don’t use the same thermometer in both places.
- At ages four or five years old, you also can take your child’s temperature by placing the thermometer in his mouth (orally). After turning on the thermometer, place the small end under your child’s tongue, toward the back of his mouth. Ask him to close his mouth around the thermometer, and hold it in place. Remove it after about a minute, or until you hear the thermometer “beep” or see it light up. Then read the number.

*Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)*