

Fever in Infants and Young Children

Fever is a common symptom of illness. It may be the presenting symptom in either viral illness or bacterial illness. A fever is your child's natural way of fighting off infection and is a sign that his/her immune system is responding. Importantly, the degree of fever does not necessarily indicate the severity of a child's illness (a high fever may accompany a minor illness while a persistent low grade fever may be a symptom of a more serious infection).

Although fever may make your child feel uncomfortable and cranky, it is not considered dangerous. We recommend you take your child's temperature whenever they feel feverish. The best method in young children is a digital rectal thermometer. We recommend that you give either acetaminophen or ibuprofen to your child to make them feel more comfortable. Infants less than 6 months of age should NOT be given ibuprofen. Some children will continue to have fever even after being given an adequate dose of fever reducers.

In small infants, less than 6 months, we generally consider a fever to be anything over 100.4 F (38 C). In older children, fever is generally anything over 101 F (38.3 C).

In very young infants (less than 8 weeks of age) we take fever very seriously because these small infants may have a serious infection without many other symptoms. Therefore an elevated temperature above 100.4 F may be our only marker of infection. If your very young baby has a fever, you should CALL US IMMEDIATELY. We will arrange to have your child seen right away in our office or at the emergency room. We will need to draw blood, check the baby's urine, and sometimes check the baby's spinal fluid to make sure they have no serious bacterial infection.

Infants younger than 6 months should not be given infant ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil etc). Infant acetaminophen (Tylenol) is fine to use under 6 months of age.

In older infants and children, fever is still a sign of infection, but may be a sign of either a virus or a bacterial infection. We still want to see your child to make sure that there is no sign of a bacterial illness that requires antibiotics. The most important factor in determining whether your child needs to be seen immediately is how your child looks to you. Most of the time, even when older children have fever, they are ill with a viral illness and will, not need an antibiotic medication. If the fever persists more than three or four days, we would like to check your child again.

Go to our Educational Resources Page for dosing of the fever reducers mentioned above.

