

# Fevers

Fever is a rise in body temperature. Running a fever is how the body fights infection. Not all fevers need to be treated. The main reason to give medicine for a fever is to relieve some of your child's discomfort. Your child's temperature will normally vary with age, activity level and the time of day. However, call your clinic when your child has a fever and is 3 months old or younger, if the fever comes on suddenly, or if he is less active and more crabby.

When your child has a fever, the way he acts is as important as his temperature. If the child remains playful and is eating, the fever is less serious.

If your child is pulling at his ears, crying when wetting, acts like his throat is sore, and is not interested in playing or eating, you should talk to your doctor.

## Taking your child's temperature

There are a few different ways to take your child's temperature. For babies and toddlers, it is likely you will measure it in the rectum or under the arm or armpit. To take your child's under-arm temperature:

- Make sure your child's armpit is dry and there is no clothing between arm and chest.
- Place tip of thermometer in armpit and bring arm to side.
- Keep thermometer in place for length of time indicated by the manufacturer.
- Read temperature.
- A normal temperature is 97°F (36.2°C) to 98.6°F (37°C).
- An elevated temperature is higher than 100.4°F (38°C).

Be sure to tell your clinic that you have taken your child's temperature under the arm.

Do not keep a glass (mercury) thermometer in your home. If it breaks, your child can be cut. Also, mercury is dangerous to everyone in the family and can leak out. Digital thermometers, which are a safer alternative, can be found at your local pharmacy.

Dispose of your glass (mercury) thermometer safely. To find the location of your county's household hazardous waste collection site, call the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency at 651-296-6300 or 1-800-657-3864.

## Treatment of fevers

Some fevers do not need to be treated and will improve by themselves. If needed, the following tips may be helpful in improving your child's comfort.

- Drink extra fluids such as water, diluted juice, ice pops and broth. Fever can lead to dehydration.
- Stay cool by keeping the room temperature cool and dress lightly. Sleep with a light blanket or sheet.
- Before giving any medicine, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen, check with your baby's doctor.

## Other tips

- Keep room temperature at 70°F to 74°F (21.1°C to 23.3°C).
- Do not overdress your child. Too many clothes or blankets trap body heat. Keep child's clothing light — dress in light pajama or undershirt. Do not use heavy bed coverings or clothes.
- If your doctor recommends a sponge bath:
  - Sponge 15 to 20 minutes in water that is slightly warm (not cold or hot).
  - Increase the water temperature if your child is shivering. (Add warm water with your child out of the tub or sink.)
  - Stop sponging when your child's temperature goes down.

- If your child is shivering:
  - Increase the clothing or blankets slightly until shivering stops.
  - Increase room temperature slightly until shivering stops.

Never give aspirin to your child! Young children who take aspirin are at risk for Reye's syndrome (a nervous system disorder). Many medicines you can buy at the store contain aspirin. Read all medicine labels to make sure they do not have aspirin in them. Always talk to your clinic first before giving any medicine.

Make sure you always take your child's temperature BEFORE giving her any medicine to help reduce fever or discomfort. You want to know what her temperature is at the start and how the medicine may change it later.

## Acetaminophen

This medication is known by the brand name Tylenol®. For young children, this medication comes in liquid form. It can be given every four to six hours as needed.

When giving this medication, your child's weight is the most important way to decide how much medication to give. The directions on the bottle or in the box will tell you how much liquid and how many tablets contain how many milligrams (mg) of the medicine. Always talk to your clinic if you are unsure about which or how much medicine to give your child.

## Ibuprofen

Your clinic may want you to give ibuprofen. Brand names include Children's Liquid Advil® and Motrin®. Do not give ibuprofen unless told to do so by your clinic. This is a powerful drug and can make your child sick if given incorrectly.

Like acetaminophen, this medication is usually given to small children in liquid form. It can be taken every six to eight hours and always with food. If your clinic tells you it is OK to give your child ibuprofen, follow the directions on the bottle or in the box to find out how much medicine to give your child based on their weight.