

Fever

Fever is an increase in the body's temperature above the normal range. Body temperature can vary throughout the day, and may be different from one person to the next. It is hard to give an exact temperature for a fever, but most doctors agree that a temperature over 101° F is a fever.

The body's temperature is controlled by a part of the brain that acts as a thermostat. Fevers are caused when the thermostat is set higher than normal. This is usually in response to an infection from a virus or bacteria. It can also happen with heat exhaustion, extreme sunburn and other medical conditions.

Fevers lower than 101° F do not need to be treated unless your child is uncomfortable or has a history of *febrile seizures*. Even higher temperatures are not typically dangerous unless there is a history of seizures or long-term illness. More important than the temperature is your child's behavior. If your child is eating and sleeping well, is playful some of the time, and is comfortable, you may wait to see if the fever improves without treatment.



Picture 1 DO NOT give aspirin.

Home Treatment

- Dress lightly. While your child is sleeping cover him with a sheet or light blanket.
- Try to have your child drink extra fluids.
- Your child can drink milk as normal, but solid food may be hard for him to digest. Do not worry if your child does not want to eat while he has a fever.
- It is okay to let your child up out of bed, but he should play quietly and rest.
- Medicines such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen can be used for a fever higher than 101° F or if your child is uncomfortable. These medications are safe, effective ways to lower the fever. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may be used in all children over 2 months. Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) may be used in children over 6 months. Follow the package directions or talk to your doctor or pharmacist for dosing instructions. Do **NOT** give aspirin to children. Aspirin has been linked to a disease called Reye's syndrome, which can be fatal.

Caution: Medicines that reduce fever come in different strengths. Make sure you are using the correct strength before giving it to your child.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor immediately if your child has a fever and:

- Is younger than 2 months of age and has a rectal temperature of 100.4° F or higher.
- Looks very ill, is very fussy, or is hard to wake up.
- Has been in an extremely hot place, such as an overheated car.
- Has a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe stomachache, unexplained rash, or repeated vomiting and diarrhea.
- Has a condition that lowers immunity, such as sickle cell disease, cancer, or frequent oral steroid use.
- Has had a seizure.
- Shows signs of dehydration – dry or sticky mouth, sunken eyes, not urinating.

Sponge Baths

Sponge baths may be used along with medicines to treat a fever over 104° F. Or sponge baths can be used to lower the temperature if your child is vomiting and cannot keep medicine down. Sponge baths usually start to work within 15 minutes.

To give a sponge bath for a child that can be put in the bathtub:

- Place your child in a bathtub with lukewarm (85° - 90° F) water. Sponge water over his skin. Evaporation will help cool the skin and lower the fever.
- If your child cannot sit in the bathtub, lay lukewarm wet washcloths on his stomach, groin, under the arms and behind the neck.
- Do not use cold water to sponge your child. This is uncomfortable and could cause shivering. This can increase the temperature.
- Do not add alcohol to the water. Alcohol can be absorbed into the skin or inhaled. This can cause serious problems, such as coma.
- If your child struggles with the sponge bath, let him play in the water. If he still is upset, it is better to stop, even if the temperature is still high.



Picture 2 Sponging with warm washcloths helps bring down a high fever.

To give a sponge bath for a child that cannot be put in the bathtub:

- Dip washcloths in *warm* – not hot, water and wring them out. Place washcloths on the child's stomach, groin, under the arms, and behind the neck.
- Change the washcloths as soon as they start to cool. The cool washcloths should be replaced with warm washcloths.
- After 20 minutes, remove the washcloths and dry your child. Cover your child with a light blanket.
- Wait 30 minutes and take your child's temperature.
- If the temperature is above 103° F or is going higher, repeat the sponging.