



Fever

What is fever?

Normal body temperature is 37°C (98.6°F) and body temperature changes throughout the day. A fever is when the body's temperature is raised above its normal level. It is generally accepted that the following temperatures represent a fever:

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| • Rectal: | 38°C | (100.4°F) or higher |
| • Oral: | 37.5°C | (99.5°F) or higher |
| • Axilla (underarm): | 37.5°C | (99.5°F) or higher |
| • Tympanic (ear): | 38°C | (100.4°F) or higher |

What are the symptoms?

Fever is very common in childhood. Most often, fever is the body's way of indicating there is an infection or illness. Signs and symptoms that may accompany fever are: excessive crankiness, fussiness, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, rash, earache, headache, sore throat and crying.

How soon do symptoms of fever appear?

Fever itself is a symptom and can be caused by many illnesses and infections. An infant may have a higher than normal temperature if they are overdressed or in a hot environment. Children may also have a fever the day after they received a DPT vaccine or seven to 10 days after receiving the MMR vaccine.

How is fever diagnosed?

The degree (or height) of a fever does not necessarily indicate the severity of the illness (i.e. a high fever does not necessarily mean a serious illness nor does a low fever indicate a minor illness). The child's age, behaviour and accompanying symptoms during fever are generally the most important factors to consider when determining the seriousness of the illness.

Contact a physician if a child younger than six months of age has a fever. Contact your family doctor if a child six months of age or older has a fever greater than 39°C(102°F), a fever lasting longer than 24 hours that is not relieved by medication, or if your child has a fever lasting for more than three full days. Also consider contacting your family doctor if a child six months of age or older has a fever combined with any other symptoms such as cough, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, earache, headache, sore throat, painful urination or loss of appetite.

What is the treatment for fever?

When a child has a fever, medication is not always needed to reduce the temperature. Fever can make a child uncomfortable and can lead to dehydration, so providing comfort measures and ensuring adequate fluid intake are the main treatments. Medication such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be used as recommended by a doctor or pharmacist. Dosage should be given as recommended on the package. It is important to not exceed the daily (24 hour) maximum as per package instructions.

Never administer acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) to a child or teenager with a fever as there is an association between aspirin use and Reye's syndrome, a serious illness of vomiting, agitation and tiredness, which can lead to coma and even death.

What activities can my child participate in?

A child may continue to attend a childcare facility or school if able to participate in activities. Fever may be the result of an infection or illness, so treatment of the cause of the fever will help. To prevent the spread of other illnesses or infections in childcare facilities or schools, a child may be required to stay at home and be excluded from day care or school until a physician states it is safe for the child to return or as required by the facility (e.g. 24 hours after starting treatment or after last symptom). Check with your school or day care provider for specific policies.

Are there any special concerns about fever?

Seek emergency medical care if a child has difficulty breathing, unusual drowsiness, and a stiff neck, is not as alert as usual, or is dehydrated.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809