

Fever

Brief Version

What is a fever?

A fever means the body temperature is above normal. Your child has a fever if:

- The rectal temperature is over 100.4 F (38 C).
- The temperature taken by mouth is over 99.5 F (37.5 C).
- The armpit temperature is over 99.0 F (37.2 C).
- The ear temperature is over 100.4 F (38 C).

Fever helps fight infections. Most fevers are not harmful. They may last 2 or 3 days.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Use medicine only if the child needs it.** Remember that fever helps your child fight the infection. Use medicine only if the fever is over 102 F (39 C) and your child is uncomfortable.
 - You can give acetaminophen (Tylenol) to children older than 2 months. Fever medicine lowers the fever by 2 to 3 F (1 to 2 C). Your child's dosage is _____ every 4 to 6 hours, as needed.
 - You may want to give your child ibuprofen instead. Ibuprofen (Advil) works 2 hours longer than acetaminophen. Give the right dose for your child's weight, every 6 to 8 hours, as needed.
- **Do not give your child aspirin.**
- **Sponge your child if the fever does not go down.** Sponge your child if your child's temperature stays over 104 F (40 C) 30 minutes after your child has taken acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Always give your child acetaminophen first. Sit your child in only 2 inches of lukewarm water. Sponge off the child's skin. If your child shivers, stop sponging or put in more warm water.
- **Have your child drink a lot of cold fluids.**
- **Have your child wear as little clothing as possible.** Do not bundle up your child. It will make the fever go higher.

For fevers of 100 to 102 F (37.8 to 38.9 C), cold fluids and little clothing may be all your child needs. Your child shouldn't need acetaminophen.

Call your child's doctor right away if:

- Your child is less than 3 months old.
- Your child's fever is over 105 F (40.6 C).

- Your child looks or acts very sick.

Call your child's doctor within 24 hours if:

- Your child is 3 to 6 months old (unless the fever is due to a DTP shot).
- The fever is between 104 and 105 F (40 to 40.6 C).
- Your child has had a fever more than 24 hours and you don't know what is causing it.
- Your child has had a fever for more than 3 days.
- The fever went away for over 24 hours and then came back.
- You have other concerns or questions.