

Fever and Kids: When to Treat and How to Treat

By: Dr. Rebecca White

Having a child means some day you will have a child who has a fever. Fevers usually come with infections, as fever one of the ways the body makes itself inhospitable to virus and bacteria. Although fevers make children hot or warm to touch, a child can be warm to touch without having a fever. The easiest way to see if a child has a fever is to take his temperature. There are multiple ways to take a temperature, the best depending on the temperament and age of your child. Each area of the body has different temperatures, so the temperature indicating your child has a fever will depend on where you take the temperature. Your child has a fever if his or her temperature reads above:

Rectal (in the bum) 100.4

Oral (in the mouth) 99.5

Axillary (under the armpit) 98.6

Tympanic (ear) 100.0

Remember that fevers themselves are helping the body get rid of the illness, so fevers are not dangerous for most children and infants over the age of 3 months. There are a few children who will have a seizure when they have a fever, but this is very infrequent. So when we recommend treatment of fever, we actually are not treating a fever because the fever itself is dangerous. We make the recommendation to treat a fever so that the child is more comfortable, will eat and drink, and sleep better. If your child is eating and drinking fine, it is not necessary to treat a fever, as it won't make the illness go away any faster. But treating a fever can allow your child to eat and drink more normally, which is important.

The most common medications to use to treat fever in children are acetaminophen (Tylenol, Pandalol and others) and ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil and others). Physicians **do not** recommend use of aspirin in children as it can cause serious side effects. Doses of fever relieving medications are given by weight or/and age. Remember that both acetaminophen and ibuprofen come as drops to be used in infants, elixirs that are given to toddlers, and chewable tablets to be given to older children. Drops and elixir are both liquids but contain different amounts of the medication. You must read the label so that you give the correct amount and not too little, or too much.

Tips for giving Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen safely:

1. Read the label before you open the bottle, after you measure a dose, and once more before you give it.
2. Do not give the medication more frequently than the label or your provider recommends.
3. Many cold, allergy and flu medications also have acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If using two products, it is better **not** to use two products that both have fever medication in them, so to be sure not to give your child too much.

4. When measuring the medication of your child, use the syringe, dropper, dosing spoon, or medicine cup. This is more accurate than using home teaspoons.

Other ways to treat a fever and keep your child comfortable

1. If your child is shivering, keep them warm until the shivering stops. If your child is not shivering, then take off warm clothes and place them in light ones.
2. Encourage your child to drink fluids.
3. Sponge your child with luke-warm water. Make sure the water does not feel either warm or cool to your touch (85-90°) as you use it. Put your child in a tub of one to two inches of the tepid water and then sponge the water of the arms, legs and trunk. If your child starts to shiver, stop the luke-warm bath and warm them instead.
4. Do not use rubbing alcohol to cool as child. It can be absorbed through the skin.

Remember:

1. Call your medical provider if fever occurs in infant < 3months.
2. Call your medical provider if your child is vomiting and has a fever.
3. Call your medical provider if the fever is lasting more than 24hrs without knowing what is causing the fever.
4. Do not use more than five does of acetaminophen or four doses of ibuprofen in a 24-hour period.
5. If you do need to treat a fever, you do not need to get your child's temperature normal. Just lower it so they are more comfortable and will drink fluids and sleep better.