

## Fever in Children

Anyone who has children knows that with childhood comes fever. Fever is the body's natural defense against bacteria and viruses and turns on the body's immune system. It is a symptom, not a disease. Fever is actually a good thing. Your child has a fever if

- The rectal temperature is over 101 F (38.4 C)
- Oral temperature is over 101 F (38.4 C)
- Rectal temperature in infant less than 2 months over 100.4 F (38.0 C)

It is important to actually take the child's temperature. Parents often present to the hospital stating their child has a fever but when questioned state they didn't actually take the temperature but the child "felt warm". Many things can cause a child to feel warm including exercise, play, warm weather or excessive clothing.

Most fevers with a viral illness range from 101 F to 104 F and last for 3-4 days. In general, how high the temperature gets does not relate to the seriousness of the illness. **How sick your child acts is what counts.** Fever causes no permanent harm until it reaches 107 F (41.7 C). Fortunately, the brain's thermostat keeps untreated fevers below this level. In viral illness there is no "quick fix" medication. The virus simply needs to run its course over several days as the body's immune system fights the illness.

Parents and caregivers often worry that a child will have a seizure related to the fever (febrile seizure). These seizures are not caused by the fever itself but rather by the rapid rise, or conversely, the rapid descent of the fever. For example, a child could potentially have a seizure if the temperature were to quickly rise to 102 F when it was only 97 F 20 minutes earlier.

It is also important to realize that children with a fever less than 3 days do not necessarily need to be evaluated by their Primary Care Provider. The exception to this is an infant less than four months old. The Primary Care Provider should evaluate all fevers in children under four months old.

For children older than four months of age, if the child is behaving as usual with drinking fluids, going to the bathroom (voiding) at least 6 times per day and there are no other unusual symptoms, you can keep the child at home and treat with over-the-counter medications. Children's acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Children's Motrin) can be used for children 6 months of age and older. Remember that fever is a good thing and the medication is to treat the discomfort that often comes with a fever, not the fever itself.

For correct medication dosages and times consult your pharmacy or Primary Care Provider.