

# Fever in the Infant and Child



Nurse Practitioner Child and Youth  
Primary Care Clinic

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4

604-875-3039

www.bcchildrens.ca

## What is a fever?

A **fever** is a rise in body temperature. Fevers can be caused by an infection (virus or bacteria). Sometimes, fevers are caused by an immunization.

A fever is a positive sign. It means that the body's immune system is working.

## Can a fever harm my child?

Generally, fevers are not harmful. Only fevers over 44° C for long periods of time can cause brain damage.

A fever may cause a **febrile seizure** in children between the age of 6 months and six years. If your child has a seizure for the first time, take them to the Emergency Department.

## How do I know if my child has a fever?

- Often, an infant or child with a fever feels hot when you touch them.
- Their face may be red, but their hands and feet are cool or pale.
- They are often fussy and tired.
- Sometimes they shake. This is called **chills** or **rigors**. This shaking is normal and is not a seizure.

The best way to know if your child has a fever is to take their temperature.

## How do I take my child's temperature at home?

There are 3 ways to take a child's temperature at home:

- By mouth (oral)
- In the armpit (axillary), or
- In the ear (tympanic).

The most accurate way to take your child's temperature depends on their age.

**For infants and children up to 5 years old**, take the temperature in the armpit. In hospital, the most accurate way is to take a rectal (bum) temperature.

**For children over 5 years old**, take the temperature is by mouth. You can also use the armpit.

## Helpful hints:

- Do not use mercury thermometers. They are dangerous when broken.
- Do not use a temporal artery thermometer or fever strip at home. These are not accurate enough.
- Avoid tympanic (ear) thermometers. Their reading is often too low.

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## What temperature is a fever?

Your child has a fever if their temperature is:

- > 37.5° C in the armpit
- > 38° C in the mouth
- > 38° C in the bum

## What can I do if my child has a fever?

**If your child is younger than 6 months old**, you can give them Acetaminophen (Tylenol®). This medicine might help to bring down the temperature. It will likely make your child feel more comfortable. If your child is not bothered by the fever, medicine is not necessary.

**If your child is over 6 months old**, you can give them Ibuprofen (Advil®) or Acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Ibuprofen is often more effective. Always follow the instructions on the package.

Offer lots of fluids to your child and keep them well hydrated. If your child is an infant, give breastmilk or formula. For children, you can give water, juice, soup, Jello®, or popsicles.

If your child does not want to eat solid food, that is okay. Pedialyte® is a good option if your child does not want to eat.

Remove extra blankets and clothing to let body temperature lower. Do not remove all clothing. Do not give a sponge bath.

**Do not give ASA (Aspirin®). This can increase the risk of Reye's syndrome.**



**When to See Your Child's Nurse Practitioner (NP) or Doctor/Go to the Emergency If...**

**Take your child to your NP/doctor if your child:**

- Has a fever for more than 5 days
- Gets sicker, not better
- Has a fever with a skin rash
- Feels pain when they pee

**Take your child to the Emergency Department if your child:**

- Is younger than 3 months old
- Seems confused or is hearing things that are not there
- Is dehydrated or not drinking fluids
- Has trouble breathing
- Has a seizure
- Has stiff neck
- Has a bad headache
- Does not respond to you, or has trouble waking up

*If you are not sure what to do, contact your NP/Doctor.*