

FEVER

A fever is a bodily defense against infections. Any infection can cause our bodies to respond with a fever. Simple colds and runny noses can prompt our bodies to run a very high fever or a very slight fever. Severe infections, like pneumonia or meningitis, can also elicit the very same response. Therefore, the height of a fever does not predict the severity of the infection.

A normal fever response can range from 100°F (37.7°C) to as high as 105°F (40.6°C)! It is unusual for the body to maintain a temperature over 104°F (40°C), especially if using Tylenol or Motrin. Temperatures of 106 °F (41.1°C) and above are beyond normal and can cause damage. In most cases, temperatures over 105°F (40.6°C) occur if the person is not sufficiently hydrated.

The most accurate way to take a temperature is by an old-fashioned glass thermometer. In infants under 2 months of age, a rectal temperature is required. After 2 months of age, accuracy is less crucial and an oral or ear thermometer is acceptable. Digital thermometers are quicker and becoming more accurate.

The first 2 months of your baby's life is a very critical time period. During this critical time period, your baby's immune system is not strong enough to fight off most infections. If your baby develops **ANY** fever over 100°F (37.7 °C) at any time during these 2 months, you **MUST** immediately call your physician because your baby can be very sick. A fever at this age is considered an **EMERGENCY** and requires immediate attention at a hospital. This is not because the fever itself is dangerous. However, it can represent a serious infection during an age when an infant's immune system is weak.

After 2 months of age, a fever is **NOT** an emergency but simply a sign that your baby is fighting off either a viral or bacterial infection. You are not obliged to treat every fever with Tylenol or Motrin. In most cases, if the child is relatively comfortable, it is best to give him/her plenty of fluids to drink and let the fever run its course. The fever your child generates will help fight off an infection (viral or bacterial) and will help shorten the illness. However, if the child is uncomfortable, it is reasonable to treat the fever. The goal with treatment is to gradually reduce the fever and to make the child more comfortable. It is unlikely that you will be able to eliminate the fever completely with fever medications and this is also not necessary. When fever medications wear off, (usually in 4-6 hrs) the fever will likely return. Most of the time, a fever from viral illnesses may last from 3-5 days with higher temperatures in the evening hours. The important signs to monitor during an illness are:

1.) Is the child drinking enough fluids and, therefore, urinating approximately every 4-5 hours? If not, then call us.

2.) Is the child comfortable enough to get, at least, a few hours of uninterrupted sleep? If he/she is too uncomfortable to sleep, an appointment should be made for your child to be seen at the office.

3.) Has the fever lasted more than 5 days? If your child has had more than 5 days of fever, this may represent a possible bacterial infection and your child should be seen at the office within the next 24-48 hours.

Tips for reducing a fever:

- Dress your child in one layer of light cotton clothes. Avoid using heavy blankets and covers.
- Wipe your child down with wet, lukewarm washcloths (use only lukewarm water, rubbing alcohol is not acceptable).
- Do not immerse your child in a bath as it is not safe to rapidly drop your child's body temperature in this way.
- Give your child either Tylenol (Acetaminophen) or Motrin/Advil (Ibuprofen) based on your child's weight and age. See dosing instructions for fever medications via the link on our homepage. Tylenol and Motrin can be given as close as 4 hours apart and may be alternated every 4 hours for a persistently high fever.

Remember, this page is meant to guide you in addressing your child's fever. If at any time you feel unsure or worried about your child despite reading the information on this page, please do not hesitate to call the office.