



Pediatric Partners OF VIRGINIA

FEVER

Fever is a remarkable, useful signal that alerts us that there is an illness in the body. The degree of fever does not always indicate the seriousness of the illness. Some children respond to a slight illness with considerable temperature elevation. On the other hand, certain dangerous illnesses such as appendicitis are sometimes accompanied by very little fever. Fevers can fluctuate over the course of the day. Temperatures are typically the highest in the evening.

It is important to look past the height of the fever to evaluate the severity of your child's illness. It is necessary to observe the child's state of alertness, awareness of the surroundings, response to stimulation, and playfulness. If these are close to normal, there is no need for alarm. This situation will apply to the great majority of episodes of fever.

Symptoms such as labored or difficulty breathing (not congested or stuffy nose), sore throat without cold symptoms, delirium, whimpering, moaning, stiff neck, excessive listlessness, poor eye contact, pain, or rash caused by tiny bleeding spots under the skin are all reasons for evaluation. A child who has a fever persisting longer than 48 hours without obvious site of infection or a child with fever for longer than 72 hours for any reason should be evaluated. Children with fever who have been evaluation and persist to have fevers may need re-evaluation. This is true of children who have fevers for more than 5 days.

You may feel that you would like to have your child examined if they do not fit into the above situations, but you need not have a feeling of urgency.

1. **Should a fever be treated?** Not always. Fever is part of the body's defense against illness. It helps the physician follow the course of an illness to determine when the infection is under control. Fever should be treated only if it is causing undue discomfort to the child and preventing the child from resting.
2. **Will fever cause convulsions or brain damage?** Certain children are susceptible to convulsions with fever, but the convulsions usually occur at the beginning of an illness - even before the parents realize the child has an illness. Although frightening to the observer, the convulsion does no harm to the child. A convulsion from fever should last less than 15 minutes and be followed by a period of grogginess or sleep. Fevers do not cause brain damage.

3. **Do antibiotics control fever?** Fever is only a symptom. It is not a disease. Therefore, fever is not cured by an antibiotic unless it is caused by a bacterial infection. Most fevers are caused by viral infections which are neither cured nor helped by antibiotics. Unnecessary antibiotics may cause an allergic reaction, hide serious disease, or contribute to bacteria which do not respond to antibiotics.
4. **Does teething cause fever?** If fever does occur with teething, it is minimal and brief. The child does not appear ill although teething may cause mild irritability.

CONTROLLING SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH FEVER (irritability, discomfort, and fretfulness)

1. Encourage fluids.
2. Dress the child lightly and do not cover the child with blankets. Heavy clothing or blankets may increase or prolong the fever.
3. Medications such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen or Advil) are useful for discomfort and will temporarily lower the fever. They will not cure the illness and do not relieve congestion. Follow the package guidelines very closely with each use and never give more than the recommended dose or interval.
4. If the child cannot tolerate medication by mouth to reduce fever (a vomiting child), rectal acetaminophen suppositories are available without a prescription. Always follow the recommended dose.
5. If your child is still uncomfortable from the fever, you may place the child in a lukewarm or room temperature bath up to the child's waist. Sponge over the child's entire body for 10 to 20 minutes. A hot child may cry and shiver during the sponging, but continue until the fever is down and the child is more comfortable. Bathing is not needed to reduce fever if the child is comfortable.
6. Do not use alcohol rubs or ice water enemas for fever.

FEVER IS **NOT** A CAUSE FOR PANIC! The best therapy for a hot child is a cool parent. Understanding the meaning of fever and practicing these principles will enable you to better care for this common symptom.