

# Fever in Infants/Children



Fever in children is extremely worrisome to parents and caregivers. It is one of the most common reasons for phone calls to our office. Please remember that a fever is defined as a rectal temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius. Fever itself is never dangerous and the degree of the temperature does not correlate with the severity of a disease. Rather, what is more important is how your child looks and is acts when the fever is reduced. Most children are cranky and irritable with a fever. We recommend giving a dose of acetaminophen or ibuprofen or a lukewarm bath and monitoring your child's activity level.

For infants over 8 weeks of age it is safe to give a dose of infant acetaminophen. For infants and children greater than 6 months of age, acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be used. Please see our educational resource page on our website for the proper dosing. \*\*\* Remember that the medications do not treat the cause of the fever but rather, temporarily lower the body's temperature to make a child more comfortable. \*\*\* It is safe to alternate the acetaminophen with the ibuprofen as long as you wait 4 hours between acetaminophen doses and 6 hours between ibuprofen doses. Both may be given at the same time.

An elevated temperature just indicates that there is an infection (bacterial or viral) or inflammation in the body. It is the body's first line of defense against this infection. It is a natural response that our immune system creates to help fight off infections. We do not advise waking a child to take the temperature or give medications. Rest and fluids are the most important treatments of an illness.

To determine the cause of the fever, we will generally need to see your child in the office. For children over 2 months of age, we usually recommend waiting at least 24 hours before bringing your child to the office, as most illnesses will go away without treatment. You may bring your child in at any point if you are uncomfortable or your child is ill appearing.

Signs that a fever may indicate a more severe illness that needs IMMEDIATE attention include:

- 1) A child who is lethargic (that is, not interactive, awake, alert or arousable)
- 2) A child who is not acting like him/herself
- 3) A child who is unable to tolerate any liquids
- 4) A stiff neck
- 5) A purple blotchy rash or pinpoint red dots scattered on the body.

Infants younger than 8 weeks of age who have a rectal temperature of 100.4 or more need to be evaluated by a physician that day. You must call as soon as you realize your child has a fever. Young infants may have a more serious infection without obvious symptoms. After your child is seen, the doctor will want to do laboratory tests to

check for serious infections in the blood, urine or spinal fluid (meningitis.)

Any child younger than 28 days will be admitted to the hospital for at least 48 hours for intravenous antibiotics. Older infants may be admitted, depending on the results of the preliminary tests.

Please do not hesitate to call us with any questions/concerns.