

FEVER Management

A guide for parents and caregivers

Fever is a process by which the body helps to fight off an infection or responds to an insult to the body's immune system. It is a normal and generally safe experience. Left untreated the fever actually helps the body to defend itself from illness. Unfortunately, it is sometimes accompanied by uncomfortable side effects, such as malaise, chills, sweating, and muscle aches. The height of the fever is not necessarily related to the severity of the illness.

What is Fever? For infants younger than 3 months a rectal temperature of greater than 100.4 is considered fever. For children 3 months and older a axillary or oral temp greater than 101 qualifies as a fever.

The reason to treat fever is to make children physically comfortable and parents mentally comfortable. You do not have to treat fever if the child appears comfortable, but if you have any doubt about how the child is acting with fever, please call us.

Measuring devices:

Digital rectal thermometers are a must for determining fever in children less than 3 months of age, but without this, "temperature by parent's touch" can be reliable. These thermometers must be **held** in place to avoid injury. Ear thermometers or the fever strips for the forehead are not very accurate in this age group. Axillary digital measurement of temperature is preferred for children until they are old enough to properly hold an oral thermometer under their tongues.

Glass thermometers with mercury should be *avoided* in all children or homes with children. There are risks from broken glass, but mainly from exposure to the mercury in case of breakage.

Treatments:

Remember to ask for the correct dose based on your child's weight which, of course,

changes with growth. **DO NOT ALTERNATE** Tylenol and Ibuprofen unless told to do so. **AVOID THE USE OF ASPIRIN** unless there is a specific direction to do so.

Tepid baths: This treatment is rarely necessary. If you are going to use a bath to help lower the temperature you must also give one of the fever lowering medicines about 30 minutes before. **AVOID COLD WATER—USE LUKEWARM WATER AND SPONGE IT OVER THE CHILD.** Never use anything other than plain water! Be careful that your child does not shiver as this is the body's way to raise its temperature and may result in the temperature rising even further.

Give the medicines at the correct dose and give them enough time to work.

Avoid over-bundling: This can trap body heat and interfere with the normal process of cooling by evaporation. By the same token, be sure the child is not at risk of over-exposure.

Cautions:

True fever in a very young infant (under 8 weeks of age) is very worrisome and often requires a hospital admission to look for the source. Young infants may also experience hypothermia (or lower temperature) when combating infections. *If your infant is sleeping excessively, refusing feedings, unusually irritable, or other deviations from usual behavior, contact the clinic right away.*

Febrile Seizure

Fear of febrile seizures is common among parents. However, they are rather uncommon and usually benign or not dangerous. Seizures occur from fever when the body's temperature rises suddenly in a person susceptible to this phenomenon, *not by the height of the temperature.* Remember, the body has a natural protective "thermostat" which regulates temperature.

Prepared by Eastern Massachusetts Chapter National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners [Permission given for use by EMNAPNAP members.]