

*(Fever dos and don'ts, continued)*

Follow package directions and use **ONLY** the measuring device that comes with the medicine.

- Expect the fever to return after the medication wears off.
- Take the child's temperature before calling the doctor and report exactly what it says on the thermometer. Ear thermometers are not reliable before 6 months of age.
- Call 911 if your child is unresponsive or very difficult to awaken, or has a pinpoint purple rash and appears ill.
- If your child is less than age 3 months, call your doctor immediately with any fever 100.4° F or higher.
- Call your doctor if your child looks or acts sicker; appears to be dehydrated, becomes confused or extremely irritable, cannot touch chin to chest, if the fever lasts more than 72 hours or goes above 105° F.

**Don't:**

- Dress your child heavily or bundle with lots of covers.
- Use cool baths or alcohol baths to treat a fever.
- Let your child go without fluids.
- Ever give your child aspirin for fever.

*This information was provided by the Answer Line nurses at St. Louis Children's Hospital.*

**WE'RE READY FOR YOUR CALL**

For questions about childhood health and development or for assistance in choosing a pediatrician, our pediatric nurses can help.

Call the St. Louis Children's Hospital Answer Line at 314.454.KIDS (5437) or 800.678.KIDS (5437).

St. Louis Children's Hospital  
One Children's Place, St. Louis, Missouri 63110  
314.454.6000 • StLouisChildrens.org

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# FEVERS





## TREATING A FEVER

Although childhood fevers are common and usually harmless, they are a frequent source of anxiety for parents. Following are a few guidelines that will help parents understand when and how to treat some fevers at home, and when to call the pediatrician.

### WHAT IS A FEVER?

A fever means your child may have an infection and is the body's effort to fight it by "turning on" the immune system. Fever is a symptom – not an illness – and can make a child feel uncomfortable.

### FIGHTING INFECTION

Unless the thermometer reads 105° F or higher, a fever by itself is not necessarily a reason to call the doctor. It's the symptoms that accompany the fever that you should be concerned about, not the thermometer reading. Observe your child. Watch for signs of illness like stomachache, earache, diarrhea, vomiting, crying and irritability.



The pediatrician or family physician should be called for advice during office hours if a child has had a recurring fever for more than three days, or if you are concerned about other symptoms such as vomiting, earache or diarrhea. Call immediately if the temperature is over 105° F or for other serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing or swallowing, extreme irritability or signs of dehydration such as no tears or saliva.

Infants under 3 months are more susceptible to serious infections, so it's important to call your doctor immediately if you notice a fever in early infancy of 100.4° F or higher. Although the potential for serious infection is less in infants over 3 months of age, call your doctor's office if your child is under 2 years of age and has a fever for more than 24 hours.

### TREAT FOR COMFORT

Whether your child's temperature is 101° F or 104° F, treatment should focus on making your child more comfortable. Since a fever may actually help the body fight and shorten infections, parents should focus on treating their child's symptoms rather than trying to eliminate the fever.

Typically, fevers are managed with over-the-counter medications. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is good for children over 3 months, and ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) is appropriate for children over age 6 months unless directed otherwise by the child's doctor.

Both of these medications are effective and can reduce a fever by one or two degrees. The main goal is to make your child comfortable. There is no evidence that alternating the medications,



giving the child first acetaminophen and then ibuprofen, is safe or more effective. **Children with a fever should never be given aspirin.** Talk with your child's pediatrician about specific medications and the dosages appropriate for your child.

The bottom line ... if your child has a fever, stay calm, observe him or her, encourage fluids and treat for comfort. If you notice other symptoms of illness that appear worrisome, call your pediatrician.

### FEVER DOS AND DON'TS

#### Do:

- Encourage your child to drink more fluids.
- Dress your child in one layer of light-weight clothing.
- Offer acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Remember that the goal of fever medicine is comfort, not a normal temperature.