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Fever

What is fever?

A child has a fever if their rectal temperature is greater than 100.4. The most reliable way to check for fever in children is by using a digital rectal thermometer. Other methods, such as oral (by mouth), axillary (under the arm), and tympanic (ear), are less accurate.

What causes fever?

Fever is a sign that the body is fighting infection. Most fevers in children are caused by viral infections, like colds, that are not dangerous and usually resolve in a few days. Fevers are less commonly caused by bacterial infections like strep throat and ear infections.

Why do we treat fever?

The main reason to treat fever is to keep your child comfortable. If your child is active and drinking fluids, it is not necessary to treat the fever. If your child is irritable, lethargic, or is not drinking fluids, or if you are unsure what to do, call our office. Sometimes, the only way to rule out more serious infection is to be seen by a doctor. Fevers do not cause brain damage. In rare cases, fever can cause seizures. These “febrile seizures” are scary to watch but are not dangerous. They typically stop within five minutes. They cause no permanent harm.

When to be concerned?

- Your child is under 2 months of age.
- Your child’s fever lasts more the 3-4 days.
- Your child is acting very sick (i.e.: increased irritability, lethargy, refusing fluids).

How to treat fever?

We use Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) to treat fever. Always read the label first to avoid mistakes as different preparations and products come in different concentrations. Tylenol may be given every 4 hours if needed and Motrin every 6 hours if needed. Both medications may be used for higher fevers if your child is still uncomfortable. Give only one at a time. Wait at least one hour before giving the other medication if the high fever or discomfort persists.

Many over-the-counter cough and cold medications contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Always consult with the doctor before combining medications.

Do not use aspirin to treat your child’s fever. It can cause serious medical complications.

Do not use Motrin in children under 6 months of age.

Other ways to provide comfort:

Sips of cool fluids can often make your child more comfortable while sometimes lowering the fever. Also, keep your child rested and dressed in light clothing. You may use a cool washcloth on your child’s forehead or a lukewarm sponge bath. Avoid cold water and never use rubbing alcohol.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol)

May be given every 4 hours

| Weight | Dose | Old Infant drops (80mg/0.8ml dropperful) | New Infant liquid (160mg/5ml syringe) | Children's liquid (160mg/5ml) | Chewable Tablets (80mg) | Junior Strength (160mg) |
|--------------------|-------|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 6-11 lbs | 40mg | ½ dropper (0.4ml) | 1.25 ml in syringe | --- | --- | --- |
| 12-17 lbs | 80mg | 1 dropper (0.8ml) | 2.5 ml in syringe | ½ tsp (2.5ml) | --- | --- |
| 18-23 lbs | 120mg | 1 ½ droppers (1.2ml) | 3.75 ml in syringe | ¾ tsp (3.75ml) | --- | --- |
| 24-35 lbs | 160mg | 2 droppers (1.6ml) | 5 ml in syringe | 1 tsp (5ml) | 2 tablets | --- |
| 36-47 lbs | 240mg | --- | --- | 1 ½ tsp (7.5ml) | 3 tablets | --- |
| 48-59 lbs | 320mg | --- | --- | 2 tsp (10ml) | 4 tablets | 2 tablets |
| 60-71 lbs | 400mg | --- | --- | 2 ½ tsp (12.5ml) | 5 tablets | 2 ½ tablets |
| 72-95 lbs | 480mg | --- | --- | 3 tsp (15ml) | 6 tablets | 3 tablets |
| 96 lbs and greater | 640mg | --- | --- | --- | 8 tablets | 4 tablets |

Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil)

May be given every 6 hours

| Weight | Dose | Infant drops (50mg/1.25ml) | Children's Syrup (100mg/5ml) | Chewable Tablets (50mg) | Junior Strength (100mg) |
|--------------------|-------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 12-17 lbs | 50mg | 1.25ml | --- | --- | --- |
| 18-23 lbs | 75mg | 1.875ml | ¾ tsp 3.75ml | --- | --- |
| 24-35 lbs | 100mg | 2.5ml | 1 tsp (5ml) | 2 tablets | --- |
| 36-47 lbs | 150mg | 3.75ml | 1 ½ tsp (7.5ml) | 3 tablets | --- |
| 48-59 lbs | 200mg | 5 ml | 2 tsp (10ml) | 4 tablets | 2 tablets |
| 60-71 lbs | 250mg | --- | 2 ½ tsp (12.5ml) | 5 tablets | 2 ½ tablets |
| 72-95 lbs | 300mg | --- | 3 tsp (15ml) | 6 tablets | 3 tablets |
| 96 lbs and greater | 400mg | --- | 4 tsp (20ml) | 8 tablets | 4 tablets |

Acetaminophen is also available in suppository form in 80mg, 120mg, and 325mg dosages. The appropriate dose may be given every 4 hours to children with fever who are vomiting or unable to tolerate oral medication.