



Managing Fevers in Children (Adapted from [About Kids Health – Fever](#))

What is a fever?



A fever is a body temperature **higher than 38°C**. Temperatures between 37°C and 38°C are not considered a fever.

When your child gets a fever, it is a normal response to their body fighting an infection caused by either a virus or bacteria. It is part of their immune system trying to fight the infection.

It is important to note how long the fever is lasting, not how high the fever is.

Always use a thermometer to measure your child's temperature:

Age of Child	Most Accurate Temperature	Other Ways to Measure Temperature (easier, but less accurate)
< 3 years old	Rectal temperature	Armpit temperature
> 3 years old	Oral temperature (under the tongue)	Ear (tympanic) thermometer

How to take care of a child with a fever

- Keep your child lightly dressed and use light blankets
- Ensure your child drinks plenty of fluids
- Use medication (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) to help keep your child comfortable
- DO NOT use aspirin to treat your child's fever
- A child with a fever may not have an appetite and may not eat much. This is not a concern, if your child is taking plenty of fluids and is peeing regularly.

When to seek medical attention

Go to the nearest Emergency if:

- Your child is less than 3 months of age and has any fever over 38°C .
- Your child develops a rash that looks like small purple dots that do not go away when you apply pressure with your fingers (blanching).
- Your child is not able to keep down any fluids, is not peeing and appears dehydrated.
- Your child is in constant pain.
- Your child is lethargic (very weak) or difficult to wake up.
- Your child has a stiff neck.
- Your child has a seizure associated with fever for the first time or a long seizure associated with fever.
- Your child does not use their arms or legs normally or refuses to stand up.
- Your child appears blue around the lips or is struggling to breathe.

Book an appointment with your doctor if:

- Your child is older than 3 months and has any fever over 38°C lasting more than 72 hours.
- Your child is looking or acting sick – less interactive, irritable.
- Your child seems to be working harder to breathe, such as breathing faster or you can see your child’s ribs when they breathe in (indrawing).

For more information, visit [About Kids Health](#).

Additional Resources:

- [What You Need to Know: Fevers - CHEO](#)
- [Children’s Fever and Pain Medication - CHEO](#)

Helping your child at home

- **Fever:** Treat fever or pain with over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen if your child can take it – and if it is available.



Call your family doctor or pharmacist for advice if you are having difficulty accessing over-the-counter medicines. Information from the Canadian Pediatric Society outlines **how to take a child's temperature** and what to do if they have a fever. Here is a video on **managing fever in a child** from the U.K.'s National Health Service.

- **Red eyes and discharge:** These symptoms almost always go away on their own, without antibiotic drops or other medication. Warm compresses and artificial tears can help reduce discomfort.
- **Stuffy and runny nose:** Try saline rinsing sprays, a humidifier or a nasal aspirator.
- **Earache:** If you notice your child tugging on their ear, they may have an earache. Get assessed if your child's earache lasts more than 48-72 hours, if there is discharge from the ear or they have had more than 2-3 ear infections in the last year.
- **Cough:** Treat a cough with a humidifier or the steam from a shower. If the cough sounds like a bark, cool outside air may help. If your child is at least one year old, you can give them 1-2 teaspoons of honey in the evening.
- **Fluids:** Make sure your child gets enough fluids, including water, soups, sports drinks or even popsicles. Breastmilk/formula is enough for young babies who do not drink other fluids.

Tips to stay healthy and prevent illness

- Wear a mask (and have your child wear a mask) when in crowded, public indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often and well; use hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow instead of your hands.
- Stay home and keep your child home when they are sick, especially in the first couple of days when most infectious.
- Get the flu shot and keep COVID-19 doses up to date.



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The OCFP thanks Dr. Kate Miller and Norfolk Family Medical for the **blog post** which inspired this information.

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