

## **Fever: Home Care**

### **What is a fever?**

A fever means your child's body temperature is above normal. An average temperature is 98.6°F (37°C) if checked by mouth. Temperatures can be taken in your child's mouth (oral), under their armpit (axilla) or in their anus (rectal).

Fever is not always bad; it is not an illness itself. In fact, a fever of 101° F to 102 ° F (38.3°C to 38.9°C) may cause no harm and may help to fight off illness. However, fever is often a sign of illness.

If you need to tell the doctor what your child's temperature is, do not add or subtract a degree. Give the number that was on the thermometer and where you took the temperature (mouth, armpit, anus).

### **What causes it?**

Some normal activities may cause a child to have a temperature of 101°F (37.8°C):

- Dressing too warmly
- Having too little fluids to drink
- Being very active

**A fever may also be telling you that your child is sick.** Look for other signs of illness. Has your child recently been around other children or adults who were sick? Has your child just had an immunization or shot? Does your child:

- Have a sore throat, a cold or muscle aches?
- Have vomiting, diarrhea or doesn't feel like eating?
- Act very sleepy or is difficult to wake up?
- Act irritable or look sick?
- Have pain anywhere in the body?

### **How is a fever treated?**

- Although some children may feel chilled, you should cover your child with light clothing and light covers. Shivering makes the body temperature go up even higher so don't over dress your child if they feel chilled - heavy clothing or covers will cause the temperature to go up.
- Have your child rest or play quietly.
- Give your child plenty of liquids.
- Older children may have water, fruit juices and soft drinks, ice chips, Popsicles®, Jell-O® and ice cream.

## Treatment (continued)

- Do not use rubbing alcohol on your child's body to help bring the fever down. **Using rubbing alcohol can also be deadly for your child.** The alcohol can cause your child to be chilled and to shiver. Shivering makes the body temperature go up even higher.
- Check your child's temperature every 3 to 4 hours. If using an oral (mouth) thermometer, wait at least 15 minutes after your child has eaten or had anything to drink.
- Check with your doctor or nurse to see if you can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®). These are often used if a fever is over 102°F (38.9°C) and your child feels uncomfortable. Using fever medicines will help decrease a temperature by 2 to 3 degrees only. Your child's temperature may not return to a normal level because a fever is the body's way to "burn up" the infection.
- Do not give your child aspirin without first checking with your doctor or nurse. Aspirin may cause Reye Syndrome, a rare but serious illness.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Is younger than 3 months old and has a rectal temperature of 100.5°F (38.0°C) or higher.
- Is more than 2 years old and has an oral or rectal temperature greater than 101.5°F (38.6° C) and lasts more than 72 hours.
- Is less than 2 years of age and has a fever lasting more than 24 hours.
- Is under 1 year old, has sunken eyes, no tears when crying, and has no damp diaper for 8 hours. These are signs of dehydration.
- Is over 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and no urine for 12 hours. These are signs of dehydration.
- Looks very sick or is in pain.
- Has a seizure. If this happens, your child may fall down and have jerky, uncontrollable movements or the body may stiffen. Your child may become unconscious. Call "911" or the ambulance if your child becomes unconscious.
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**Note:** Rectal temperatures tend to be higher than oral temperatures. Armpit (axillary) temperatures tend to be lower. Do not add or subtract degrees. Simply tell your healthcare provider the number on the thermometer and how/where you took your child's temperature.

**This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.**