

MY CHILD HAS A FEVER and I'M WORRIED. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Fever is not a diagnosis. It is a word that means the body's temperature is above normal. Fever is just one way your child can show she is ill.

There are many ways to take your child's temperature:

- Forehead strips and pacifier thermometers are not very accurate, so we do not recommend using these
- Ear thermometers also may not be accurate, so should not be relied upon
- Temporal artery scanning thermometers are easy to use but are not always accurate
- Axillary temperatures (taken under the arm) are more accurate, especially in younger infants
- Rectal temperatures are usually the most accurate, especially in younger children
- Oral temperatures (taken underneath the tongue) can be used in older children who can cooperate and not bite on the thermometer

FEVER...

- Can sometimes mean you dressed your child too warmly
- Can be caused by many illnesses
- Usually indicates there is an infection present
(An infection can be caused by many kinds of germs, including viruses and bacteria)
- Is part of the body's normal response to an infection
- Can help your child fight the infection
- SO...fever can actually be helpful to your child

You may have heard some wrong ideas about fever that cause you to worry. The truth about fever is:

- Fever due to infections cannot cause brain damage or death (The infection may cause the damage – but the height of the fever does not.)
- Fever, due to infections if not treated, CANNOT keep rising or go over 110 F
- The height of the fever DOES NOT usually indicate how serious the infection is
- The illness is NOT less serious if the fever comes down after the child is given medication to treat the fever

Fever that is caused by infections cannot by itself cause brain damage or death because the body has special proteins that regulate temperature. So it is rare for an untreated fever to go above 105 F. The height of the fever and the fever's response to medicine to not usually tell us how sick the child is.

So, FEVER IS NOT DANGEROUS and DOES NOT need to be treated. The main reason to treat fever is to help your child feel more comfortable. Children are often fussy and are not willing to drink when they have a fever. Since it is very important for children who are sick to drink fluids, treating the fever may help your child stay hydrated by drinking. You can see how well your child is handling the illness by watching his ability to drink, his activity level, and his breathing.

Please be sure to call your doctor if your child has a fever AND

- is 3 months or younger
- has a seizure
- is vomiting and cannot keep fluids down
- refuses to drink liquids
- is very sleepy or irritable or fussy
- does not want to smile or play
- is having difficulty breathing or is breathing rapidly
- develops a rash that does not feel bumpy when you touch it
- you have concerns about your child
- the fever last for more than 3 days

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. "Prescriptions for Parents"

