Fever

Fever is an increase in body temperature. It is not a sickness. Fever can be caused by many things: infections, colds, flu, vaccines, hot weather, hot rooms or cars, and wearing too many clothes. Fever makes children feel bad and can change the way they act, behave, sleep, eat, and drink.

Normal body temperature ranges from 97.0° F to 100.4° F (36° C to 38° C).

The average normal temperatures are:

- 98.6° F (37° C) when taken by mouth (oral)
- 97.6° F (36.4° C) when taken under the arm (axillary)  
  (Usually measures one degree lower than by mouth.)
- 99.6° F (37.6° C) when taken rectally  
  (Measures one degree higher than by mouth.)
- 98.6° F (37° C) when taken in the ear with a special thermometer (tympanic)

If you think your child has a fever, take his temperature by using a thermometer. See the instructions below on how to take a temperature. Placing your hand on your child’s forehead is not a good way to check his temperature.

Follow the manufacturer’s instructions when using a digital or tympanic thermometer.

If your child’s temperature is higher than 101° F (38.3° C):

- He may feel better resting in bed.
- Urge him to drink water, juice, flat soda pop (stir out the bubbles).
- Dress him in light clothes (T-shirt, diaper, or pajamas).
- Keep him in a cool room (not cold).
- For infants younger than 8 weeks old, call a doctor immediately if temperature is over 100.4° F (38° C) by rectum or 98.4° F (36.9° C) axillary.
- For a child receiving chemotherapy treatment, call your child’s oncologist or nurse on call at (816) 234-3000.

Fever Medicine (Acetaminophen®/Ibuprofen®):

Always check the package for the amount to give your child based on his weight and age. Do not give for more than 3 days without calling your child’s doctor. Do not give these 2 medicines at the same time. (Do not alternate medicines).

Acetaminophen (a-seet-a-min-oh-fen) such as Tylenol®:

- You may give this medicine every 4 to 6 hours for fever.
- Do not give more than 5 doses in one day.
Ibuprofen (eye-byoo-pro-fen) such as Motrin® or Advil®:

- You may give this medicine every 6 to 8 hours for fever if your child is older than 6 months of age.
- Do not give more than 4 doses in 1 day.
- Give with food or drink.

Call your child’s doctor or the Children Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188 if:

- Your child is younger than 8 weeks old, call a doctor immediately if temperature is over 100.4° F (38° C) by rectum or 98.4° F (36.9° C) axillary.
- For a child receiving chemotherapy treatment, call your child’s doctor or nurse-on-call at (816) 234-3000.
- Your child has a fever of more than 104° F (40° C).
- Your child develops new problems (like ear pain, sore throat, stomach pain, stiff neck, rash or seizures/convulsions).
- Your child has no interest in eating, drinking or playing, is difficult to wake up or is generally not acting like himself.
- You have questions or concerns regarding your child’s fever or fever medication.

Special Instructions:

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How to Take a Temperature Using a Glass Thermometer:

Hold the thermometer at eye level. Roll it in your fingers until you see the colored (silver, red or blue) line. The lines above the place where the colored line ends show your child’s temperature. The bigger lines equal one degree. The small lines equal 0.2 degrees. The arrow on the thermometer points to normal temperature (98.6° F or 37° C).

If the colored line is above 96° F, shake the thermometer with a sharp wrist movement until the colored line drops below 96° F.

Where to Take the Child’s Temperature:

- Under the arm, for any age child
- By mouth, if your child is older than 5 years and can hold the thermometer under his tongue for 3 minutes
- By rectum, if your doctor tells you to
- By ear with a special thermometer, if older than 6 months

Always stay with your child when taking his temperature. Thermometers are made of glass and can break if your child does not stay still.
Under the Arm:
1. Hold the silver bulb of the thermometer under your child’s arm in the armpit.
2. Keep your child’s arm snugly against his body.
3. Leave the thermometer in place for 5 minutes.

By Mouth:
1. Use a thermometer with a long silver bulb.
2. Do not give your child cold or hot drinks or food for 30 minutes before you take his temperature.
3. Put the silver bulb under your child’s tongue. Tell him to close his lips.
4. Tell your child not to bite down or he may break the thermometer.
5. Leave the thermometer in place for 3 minutes.

By Rectum:
1. Use a thermometer with a short, round bulb.
2. Coat the bulb with Vaseline®.
3. Hold your child still and don’t leave him alone while taking his temperature.
4. Gently put the thermometer bulb (only the bulb) inside his rectum and hold it still for 3 minutes.
5. Do not let go of the thermometer.

Storing the Thermometer:
Clean with cool (not hot) soapy water and rinse thoroughly with cool water. Keep in a safe place away from children.

If you have questions, call the Children’s Mercy Hospital Information Line at (816) 234-3188.