Fever, Child

Fever is a higher-than-normal body temperature. A normal temperature is usually 98.6° Fahrenheit (F) or 37° Celsius (C). Most temperatures are considered normal until a temperature is greater than 99.5° F or 37.5° C orally (by mouth) or 100.4° F or 38° C rectally (by rectum). Your child's body temperature changes during the day, but when you have a fever these temperature changes are usually the greatest in the morning and early evening. Fever is a *symptom* (problem). Fever is not a disease. A fever may mean that there is something else going on in the body. Fever helps the body fight infections. It makes the body's defense systems work better. Fever can be caused by many conditions. The most common cause for fever is viral or bacterial infections, with viral infection being the most common.

SYMPTOMS

The signs and symptoms of a fever depend on the cause. At first, a fever can cause a chill. When the brain raises the body's "thermostat," the body responds by shivering. This raises the body's temperature. Shivering produces heat. When the temperature goes up, the child often feels warm. When the fever goes away, the child may start to sweat.

PREVENTION

- Generally, nothing can be done to prevent fever.
- Avoid putting your child in the heat for too long. Give more fluids than usual when your child has a fever. Fever causes the body to lose more water.

DIAGNOSIS

Your child's temperature can be taken many ways, but the best way is to take the temperature in the rectum or by mouth (only if the patient can cooperate with holding the thermometer under the tongue with a closed mouth).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Mild or moderate fevers generally have no long-term effects and often do not require treatment.
- Only take over-the-counter medicines for fever as directed by your caregiver.
- **Do not use aspirin**. There is an association with Reye's syndrome.
- If an infection is present and medications have been prescribed, give them as directed. Finish the full course of medications until they are gone.
- Do not over-bundle children in blankets or heavy clothes.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD:

- Your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**
- Becomes fussy (*irritable*) or floppy.
- Develops a rash, a stiff neck, or severe headache.
- Develops severe abdominal pain, persistent or severe vomiting or diarrhea, or signs of dehydration.
- Develops a severe or productive cough, or shortness of breath.

It is important for you to participate in your child’s return to good health. Children with fever almost always get better within a few days. However your child’s condition may change. Monitor your child’s condition and do not delay seeking medical care if your child develops any of the conditions listed above.

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