

Emergency Services

Febrile Seizures – Children

Febrile means 'from a fever'. Seizure is uncontrolled muscle spasms, twitching, or jerking.

A febrile seizure is a condition brought on by a sudden rise in body temperature.

Febrile seizures occur in children between the ages of 6 months to 4 years, and sometimes up to 6 years of age.

It is important to know that:

- Febrile seizures are not harmful to your child and do not cause brain damage.
- Febrile seizures are not the same as epilepsy and are not a sign of a problem in the brain.
- Nothing can be done to prevent the seizure from occurring.

While in hospital, the first step is to determine the cause of your child's fever.

The doctor checks your child for possible sources of infection (such as from the lungs, ears, or urine). Depending on the cause, the doctor could treat your child with antibiotics.

Care of your child at home

- Keep your child comfortable.
- Your child might still be tired and want to sleep. It is okay to let your child sleep.
- If the doctor gives you medicine to treat an infection, give it to your child as directed.
- If your child is uncomfortable and the body temperature is 38°C (100°F) or higher, lower the temperature by:
 - Giving acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin).
Note: Treating the fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen will not necessarily prevent another febrile seizure. It will make your child more comfortable though.
 - Encouraging your child to drink clear fluids such as water, juice, or ginger ale.
 - Dressing your child in light clothing. Remove heavy sweaters and blankets.
- Your child may be cranky for up to a day – this will pass.

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Can your child have another febrile seizure?

Most children only ever have one febrile seizure. However, some children can have another seizure during a future illness that includes a fever.

The chance of having another febrile seizure is greater if:

- There is a family history of febrile seizures.
- Your child had the first febrile seizure before the age of 18 months.
- Your child's seizure happened within one hour of the fever starting.
- Your child's temperature was between 39° and 40°C at the time of the seizure (between 102°F and 104°F).

What to do during a febrile seizure?

There is nothing you can do to stop the seizure. You can protect your child from injury.

- Lay your child on his or her side on a soft low surface.
- If your child is in the bathtub, take your child out and place him or her on the floor.
- Remove any sharp or hard objects near your child to prevent injury.
- Remain calm. Stay close to your child.
- Watch exactly what happens so you can describe it later to the doctor.
- If you can, time how long the seizure lasts.
- **Do not** restrain or hold your child. Seizures cannot be stopped by holding.
- **Do not** put anything in your child's mouth, including your fingers.
- **Do not** give your child anything to drink during a seizure.

Is your child awake during the seizure?

Usually, your child is not awake during the seizure. Your child should wake up when the seizure stops but will be sleepy afterwards.

Call 9-1-1 right away if:

- Your child's seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes.
- Your child does not wake up when the seizure stops.
- Your child is having trouble breathing when the seizure stops.

Arrange to see your family doctor if:

- Your child's seizure stops in less than 5 minutes.
- Your child has another seizure.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Your pharmacist
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at www.HealthLinkBC.ca.