

Emergency Services

Fever in Children

Fever is a rise in body temperature. It is a normal and healthy reaction to an infection. Fever helps the body fight infection.

What is normal body temperature?

Normal body temperature is around 37°C (98.6°F). Our body temperature usually rises during the day to around 37.6°C (99.6°F) and falls at night to around 36.3°C (97.4°F).

Measuring body temperature

Children often feel warm to the touch when they have a fever. To confirm your child has a fever, use a thermometer to measure your child's body temperature.

The most common ways are in the armpit and under the tongue.

When to use the armpit method:

- For children who are 6 years old or younger
- For children who cannot hold a thermometer under their tongue

When to use the under the tongue method:

- For children who are over 6 years old
- For children who can breathe easily through their nose

Using a digital thermometer

Armpit Method:

- Turn the thermometer on.
- Sit your child on your lap.
- Undress the arm furthest from you.
- Place the tip of the thermometer in the centre of the armpit.
- Hold the arm against your child's body.
- Remove the thermometer when you hear the beep – usually about 1 minute.
- Read the temperature.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water. Rinse well.



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Under the Tongue Method:

- Turn the thermometer on.
- Place the tip of the thermometer under the tongue, to the back of the mouth, just to one side of centre.
- Ask your child to close his or her lips around the thermometer.
- Remove the thermometer when you hear the beep – usually about 1 minute.
- Read the temperature.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water. Rinse well.

Never use a glass (mercury) thermometer.

How to care for a child with a fever

Keep your child cool but not cold.

- Dress your child in light clothing. Remove heavy sweaters and blankets.
- Keep the room temperature below 21°C (70°F).
- Use a fan in the summer to cool the room. Do not blow the cold air directly onto the child.
- Place a cool cloth on your child's forehead.
- If your child starts to shiver, cover your child. Shivering increases body temperature.

Keep your child hydrated.

- Encourage your child to drink clear fluids, juice, or ginger ale.
- If your child is breastfeeding, continue to breastfeed as well.
- Older children can also have clear gelatine desserts and popsicles.

Giving medicine for fever

Only use medicines labelled specifically for infants and children.

Give your child either:

- acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra, drug store and other brands), or
- ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, drug store and other brands)

Never give a child Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid or ASA) or anything with ASA in it.

If your child is 3 months old or younger and the body temperature is 38°C (100°F) or higher:

- Call your family doctor right away.
- **Do not** give any medicine until your doctor says it is okay to.

If you cannot contact your doctor, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

If your child is **more than** 3 months old and the body temperature is 38.5°C (101.3°F) or higher, you can go ahead and give either ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Date: _____

The correct dose for your child is based on body weight.

Your child weighs: _____

The correct dose for your child

If giving acetaminophen: _____
Every 4 hours while your child has a fever

If giving ibuprofen: _____
Every 6 hours while your child has a fever

Go to the nearest Emergency Department if:

- Your child is having trouble breathing.
- Your child has a seizure.
- Your child complains of a stiff, sore neck.

To learn more

- Ask your family doctor.
- Call 8-1-1 anytime, day or night (7-1-1 TTY) or go online at HealthLinkBC.ca.
- Check fever.trekk.ca or scan this QR code to the website.

