

# GET TO KNOW ALL ABOUT FEVER IN CHILDREN.

Many parents take huge precautionary measures to prevent their children from falling ill. But do you know that children will still fall ill from time to time despite all that? Fevers are common and there's no cause for alarm as not all fevers are an indication of anything serious. It is often the body's way of fighting infections. Now, that's something to soothe your nerves.



Your child wakes up in the middle of the night feeling flushed, hot and sweaty. You're struck by uncertainty and a tinge of panic. What do you do next? Should you get the thermometer? Call the doctor? Rush him or her to the hospital? We're usually scared of the unknown. And once you have knowledge of it, you can be in a better position to cope with it.

# Here's everything you need to know about a fever, including when a doctor is necessary.

## What is fever?

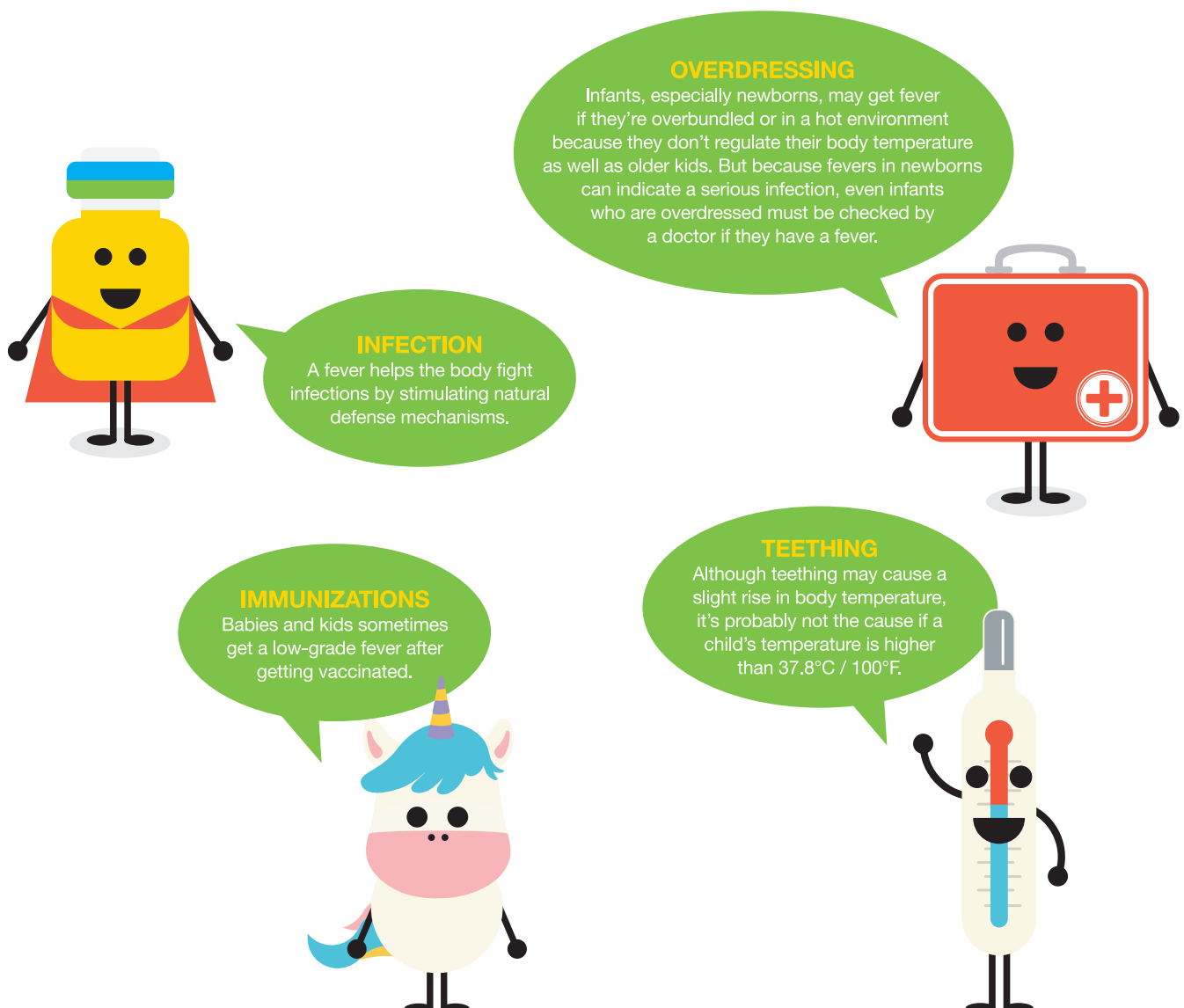
Fever happens when the body's internal 'thermostat' raises the body temperature above its normal level. This thermostat is found in a part of the brain called the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus knows what temperature your body should be (usually around 37°C / 98.6°F) and will send messages to your body to keep it that way.

Most of our body temperatures change a little bit during the course of the day. It's usually a little lower in the morning and a little higher in the evening and can vary especially if children run around, play, and exercise.

So what happens when there's an infection, illness or some other cause? In response, the hypothalamus will reset the body to a higher temperature. Turning up the heat is a way for the body to fight the germs that cause infections, making it a less comfortable place for them.

## What can cause fever?

It's important to remember that fever by itself is not an illness — it's usually a symptom of another problem. Fevers can be caused by a few things, including:



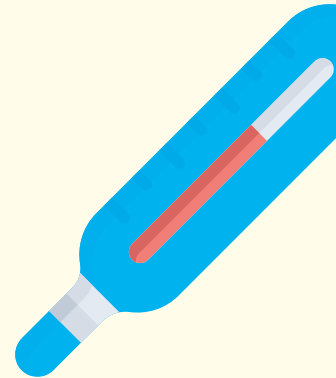
## When is it a fever?

Use a reliable **digital thermometer** to confirm a fever. It's a fever when a child's temperature is at or above one of these levels:

- measured **orally** (in the mouth): 37.8°C / 100°F
- measured **rectally** (in the bottom): 38°C / 100.4°F
- measured in an **axillary** position (under the arm): 37.2°C / 99°F

But how high a fever is doesn't tell you much about how sick your child is. A simple cold or other viral infection can sometimes cause a rather high fever (in the 38.9° – 40°C / 102° – 104°F range), but this doesn't usually mean there's a serious problem. In fact, a serious infection, especially in infants, might cause no fever or even a low body temperature (below 36.1°C / 97°F).

Because fevers can rise and fall, a child might have chills as the body's temperature begins to rise. The child may sweat to release extra heat as the temperature starts to drop. Sometimes kids with a fever breathe faster than usual and may have a faster heart rate. Call the doctor if your child has trouble breathing or is breathing faster than normal or is still breathing fast after the fever has come down.



## What if the fever is a sign of something serious?

In healthy kids, not all fevers need to be treated. High fever though, can make a child uncomfortable and worsen problems like dehydration.

Doctors decide on whether to treat a fever by considering both the temperature and a child's overall condition.

Children whose temperatures are lower than 38.9°C / 102°F often don't need medicine unless they're uncomfortable. There's one important exception: If an infant 3 months or younger has a rectal temperature of 38°C/100.4°F or higher, it's time to call your doctor or go to the emergency department immediately. Even a slight fever can be a sign of a potentially serious infection in very young babies.

If your child is between 3 months and 3 years old and has a fever of 39°C / 102.2°F or higher, call to see if your doctor needs to see your child. For older kids, please take behaviour and activity level into account. How your child behaves will give you a pretty good idea of whether a minor illness is the cause or if your child should be seen by a doctor.

The illness itself is probably not serious if your child:

is still interested  
in playing

is eating and  
drinking well

is alert and  
smiling at you

has a normal  
skin color

looks well when  
his or her temperature  
comes down

To be sure of your child's  
condition, do see our  
paediatrician or go to our  
Emergency Department.

Don't worry too much if your child has a fever and doesn't want to eat. This is very common with infections that cause fever. For children who still drink and urinate normally, not eating as much as usual is still all right.



## When should I call the doctor and emergency?

The exact temperature that should trigger a call to the doctor depends on a child's age, the illness, and whether there are other symptoms with the fever.

Call your doctor if you have an:

- infant younger than 3 months old with a rectal temperature of 38°C / 100.4°F or higher
- older child with a temperature of higher than 39°C / 102.2°F

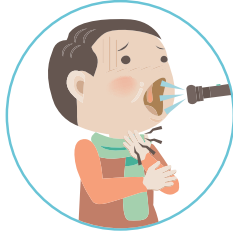
Please also call a doctor if an older child has a fever of lower than 39°C / 102.2°F and has the following conditions:

- refuses fluids or seems too ill to drink adequately
- has lasting diarrhoea or repeated vomiting
- has any signs of dehydration (peeing less than usual, not having tears when crying, less alert and less active than usual)
- has a specific complaint such as a sore throat or an ear ache
- still has a fever after 24 hours (in kids younger than 2 years old) or 72 hours (in kids 2 years or older)
- is getting fevers a lot, even if they only last a few hours each night
- has a chronic medical problem, such as heart disease, cancer, lupus, or sickle cell disease
- has a rash
- has pain while peeing

Chills



Sore throat



Nasal congestion



Headache



Dry cough



High fever



Generalized aches



Fatigue



Loss of appetite



Pains



Diarrhea



Vomiting

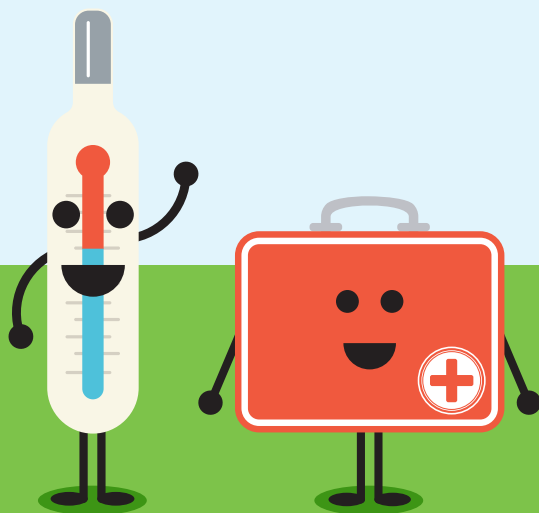




Get **Emergency Care** if your child shows any of these signs:

- crying that won't stop
- extreme irritability or fussiness
- sluggishness and trouble waking up
- a rash or purple spots that look like bruises on the skin (that were not there before your child got sick)
- blue lips, tongue, or nails
- infant's soft spot on the head seems to be bulging out or sunken in
- stiff neck
- severe headache
- limpness or refusal to move
- trouble breathing that doesn't get better when the nose is cleared
- leaning forward and drooling
- fits or seizure
- abdominal (belly) pain

Also, ask if your doctor has specific guidelines on when to call about a fever.



### What else should I know?

All children get fevers and in most cases they are completely back to normal within a few days. For older babies and children, the way they act can be more important than the reading on the thermometer. Children get irritable when they have fever. This is normal and should be expected. However if you are in doubt about what to do or what a fever might mean, or if your child is acting ill in a way that concerns you even if there is no fever, always call your doctor for advice.

## How to help your child feel better?

It is important to understand that not all fevers need to be treated. In most cases, a fever should be treated only if it's causing a child discomfort.



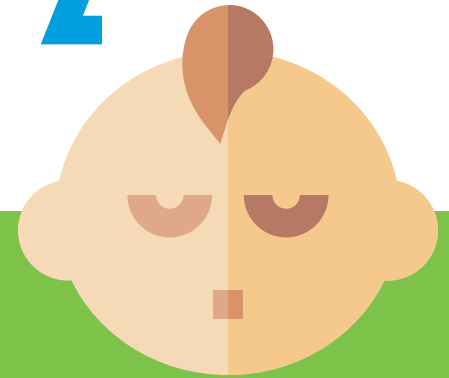
### Medicines

Infants younger than 2 months old should not be given any medicine for fever without being checked by a doctor. If your child has any medical problems, check with the doctor to see which medicine is best to use. Remember that fever medicine can temporarily bring a temperature down, but usually won't return it to normal and it won't treat the underlying reason for the fever.



### Meals

Offer plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration because fevers make kids lose fluids more rapidly than usual. Water, soup, ice pops and flavoured gelatin are all good choices. Avoid drinks with caffeine like coffee including colas and tea, because they can make dehydration worse by increasing urination (peeing). If your child is also vomiting and/or has diarrhea, ask the doctor if you should give an electrolyte (rehydration) solution made for kids. You can find these at pharmacies and supermarkets. Don't offer sports drinks though — they're not made for younger children and the added sugars can make diarrhea worse. Also, limit your child's intake of fruits and apple juice. In general, let children eat what they want in moderation. Do not force children to eat if they do not feel like it.



### Taking it Easy

Make sure your child gets plenty of rest. Staying in bed all day isn't necessary, but a sick child should take it easy. It's best to keep a child with a fever home and out of school or childcare. Most doctors feel that it's safe to return when the temperature has been normal for 24 hours.

