

When your baby is ill ...

Remember that you are the expert on your child. Trust your gut feelings about your child's behaviour and call your health care provider if you are worried.

All about Fever

A fever is not an illness in itself; it is a symptom of an illness. A fever is actually a good sign and shows that the baby's body is fighting an infection. The degree of a fever does not tell you how serious the illness is. How a child is feeling and acting, is usually a better sign.

Babies younger than 6 months old should be seen by a health care provider when they have a fever.

How do I take my baby's temperature?

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that parents first check for a fever in a child under two by taking a temperature under the arm (axilla). It is the safest and easiest, way for taking the temperature of an infant or young child.

You may suspect a fever if your child's skin feels very warm to the touch. You cannot be sure until you measure the body temperature with a thermometer. The normal underarm temperature range is: 34.7°C to 37.3°C (94.5°F to 99.1°F). A fever is anything over 37.5°C (99.5°F).

How to use a digital thermometer:

1. Read the directions that came with the thermometer before using.
2. Turn the thermometer on using its on/off button.
3. Position the baby comfortably in your arms, on your lap, or hold firmly with one arm around the shoulder.
4. Lift your child's arm and gently place the bulb of the thermometer into the fold of the armpit. Hold the child's arm flat against the chest, closing the armpit.
5. Wait until the thermometer beeps.

6. Read baby's temperature in the digital window. Turn the thermometer off. Wash the thermometer by wiping the tip only with soap and water, then rubbing with alcohol.

Call your health care provider if your child:

- Is less than 6 months and has a temperature of 37.7°C (99.9°F) or more.
- At any age, has a temperature of 38.2°C (100.8°F), even if your child seems fine.
- Is excessively cranky, fussy or irritable.
- Is excessively sleepy, lethargic or does not respond.
- Is wheezy or coughing.
- Has a fever and a rash or any other signs of illness that concern you

Caring for my child who has a fever?

- If your child has a fever, make sure he is comfortable. Offer plenty of fluids. Small amounts at regular intervals are best. Give breast milk or formula to young infants. Older babies and young children can be given diluted juice, popsicles made from fruit juice, jello and other clear fluids.
- Remove extra blankets and clothes so heat can leave the child's body and help lower the body temperature. Do not take off all your child's clothes, because the child may become too cold and start shivering
- Your health care provider may suggest a children's medication to bring down the temperature.
- Reducing your child's temperature by sponging or cool baths should not be used as this can cause discomfort.

Colds

The common cold is an infection caused by a virus that lives mostly in the nose and throat. Fever is unlikely to accompany a cold. A cold is very contagious and most children have several colds a year. Your child is most likely to get a cold in winter. Colds usually last about 7-10 days. Colds are caused by viruses and cannot be treated with antibiotics.

How do I know my child has a cold?

- runny nose
- sneezing and mild cough
- feeling achy or tired
- poor appetite
- headache
- fussiness

What can parents do to help?

There is no cure for the common cold but there are ways to help your child feel more comfortable.

1. Give your child plenty of clear fluids, e.g. water, diluted non-sweetened fruit juice, or clear soups, to prevent dehydration and keep the throat moist. Offer small nutritious meals.
2. Encourage your child to rest.
3. Do not give over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to children under six years of age.
4. Breastfeeding may be difficult because of a stuffed-up nose. If your baby is having trouble breathing, it may help to keep her upright while she breastfeeds. Saline nose drops, given 15 minutes before feeding or at bedtime, may allow her to breathe more easily.
5. Cool mist humidifiers are not recommended because of the risk of contamination from bacteria and mold. If used, they must be disinfected daily. Hot water vaporizers are not recommended because of the risk of burns.

When do I call my health care provider?

Babies under three months of age:

Call your health care provider or take your baby to an emergency department if your baby:

- has trouble breathing
- is not eating or is vomiting; or
- has a fever.

Babies and children of all ages:

Call your health care provider or take your baby to an emergency department if you notice any of the following signs:

- symptoms do not improve within 6 to 10 days or if symptoms worsen
- symptoms are accompanied by a fever higher than 38°C (101°F)
- your child is breathing rapidly or seems to be working hard to breathe
- your child's lips look blue; or
- coughing is so bad that the child is choking or vomiting

Preventing colds – what can parents do?

- Keep babies under three months of age away from people with colds, if possible.
- Handwashing is the most important way to reduce the spread of colds.
 - Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or wiping your nose.
 - Wash your own hands and your child's hands after wiping your child's nose.
 - When water and soap are not available, use premoistened hand wipes or alcohol-based hand rinses. Keep hand rinses out of the reach of children because they may be harmful if swallowed.
- Teach children to prevent spreading colds by coughing and sneezing into their arms. When they use a tissue it should be disposed of immediately in a wastebasket. They should wash their hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer before and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their nose.
- Avoid sharing toys that young children place in their mouths until the toys have been cleaned. Frequently disinfect toys and surfaces.

Diarrhea and Dehydration

Diarrhea is a very common problem in childhood. Your child has diarrhea if there are more bowel movements than normal, or the bowel movements are less formed and more watery. Your child may also have fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, cramps, blood and/or mucus in the bowel movements. Very frequent diarrhea can cause dehydration which is a serious condition.

What can happen if diarrhea is not treated properly?

Diarrhea can be dangerous if not treated properly because it drains water and salts from the child. If these are not put back quickly, dehydration can occur and hospitalization may be necessary.

What is dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when the amount of water in the body falls below normal. This disrupts the balance of sugars and salts (electrolytes) in the body.

What are the Signs of Dehydration?

- Your baby has less than 4 wet diapers in 24 hours
- Your child is very crabby
- Your child isn't smiling or playing and seems very tired
- Your child has a fever
- Your child is pale
- Your child's tongue, lips, and mouth are dry or sticky
- There are no tears when your baby cries
- The soft spot on your baby's head is sunken
- Your child has sunken eyes
- Your child is too tired to feed

Severe Dehydration includes the above symptoms and

- Rapid breathing
- Cold fingers and toes
- Unusually sleepy
- No urine output

You should take your child to the hospital right away.

Take your child to a health care provider immediately if:

- There are signs of dehydration
- Your child has diarrhea and is younger than 6 months
- There is blood in the stool
- There is frequent vomiting preventing the child from drinking
- Your child complains of abdominal pain, looks or behaves unwell, and/or has a high fever (temperature greater than 38.5°C/101.5°F)

What to AVOID if your child has diarrhea or is vomiting.

- Do not give sugary drinks such as Kool-Aid, fruit juice, sports drinks, pop, jello, tea, broth. These have the wrong amounts of water, salts and sugar. They can also make your child's diarrhea worse.
- Do not give over-the-counter medications to stop diarrhea. Some of these will prevent the body from getting rid of infections.

What should you GIVE your children if they have diarrhea or are vomiting?

- It is most important that the child with diarrhea continues to drink fluid to avoid dehydration. Water should be offered at room temperature. Iced or cold water can stimulate the bowels and lead to further diarrhea.
- Cow's milk is sometimes harder to digest since the enzyme (lactase) may be low and there may not be enough remaining for digestion. Only small amounts of milk may be tolerated, temporarily. Your health care provider may recommend lactose-free milk.
- Your doctor may suggest oral rehydration solutions to replace what is lost with diarrhea. Oral rehydration solutions such as Pedialyte or Gastrolyte are exact mixtures of water, salts, and sugar. These solutions can be absorbed by the body, even when infection is causing the child to vomit. They are available at drugstores in ready-to-serve preparations.

How is diarrhea spread?

Diarrhea germs are easily spread from person to person, especially among children. To reduce the spread of germs, adults and children should wash their hands carefully after every diaper change, going to the toilet and before preparing and eating food. Most commonly, it is caused by a virus and cannot be cured with antibiotics. Healthy children can spit up, vomit, or have a loose stool once in a while without being in danger of dehydrating.