

FEVER: WHEN DO I PANIC?

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Fever is a very misunderstood *normal* body defense mechanism. Up to 102°F fever can help fight illness. Children can have very minor illnesses and have 105°-106°F rectal temperature, or very serious illnesses and only have 101° F rectal temperature, or none at all. Fever is not harmful. It does not cause brain damage. Even if a child should have a seizure associated with fever, they are brief, self-limited, and non-harmful. Parents' fears about fever are usually unfounded and often are based on old wives' tales.

If your child is acting reasonably well, is making eye contact, is somewhat playful, will tolerate fluids, and, even though fussy, appears to be aware of his environment, then fever, in and of itself, is not a worrisome symptom and can be treated with acetaminophen in appropriate dosages. Use *tepid watersponging* if the temperature goes above 104°F rectally. If the child is shivering, the water should be warmed because shivering just continues to keep the temperature elevated. There is no need to

rapidly bring down a temperature, nor is there a need to try to achieve a normal temperature in an ill child. One only controls fever in order to make the child comfortable.

When a child needs to be seen depends very much on the age and the symptoms associated with the fever. *Fever by itself is never an emergency.* If the child is acting reasonably well, acetaminophen can be given until the child can be seen during regular office hours. A child under 4 months with fever should always be seen, no matter what the symptoms. Children under 2 or 3 years of age with rectal temperature over 101° F should be evaluated within 24 to 48 hours. An older child with no complaints might be observed for a day to see if other symptoms develop. If you have questions regarding fever, check with your pediatrician's office for further advice.

Once again, *fever is not an emergency.* Children can run elevated temperature for very prolonged periods of time (hours to weeks) without any untoward effects. ■