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"Practice Limited to Pediatrics"

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FEVER*

Fever itself is not a disease; it is a sign that accompanies a variety of diseases.

Normal body temperature varies in a daily cycle with the low point (97.6°F) in the morning and the high point (100°F) in the late afternoon. So-called "normal" temperature (37°C, 98.6°F) is the average for the normal daily range.

Fever is an oral temperature of 38°C (100.3°F) or higher or a rectal temperature of 38.4°C (101.1°F) or higher.

Below-normal temperature is nothing to worry about in a child who does not have other symptoms, except in newborn infants.

Newborn babies can have an infection without fever, especially if they are feeding poorly, irritable, or more lethargic than usual.

Acetaminophen or ibuprofen will often reduce fever and make a child more comfortable, but will not shorten the illness that is causing fever.

A child with a fever needs to drink extra fluids.

Don't try to decide whether a child has a fever by feeling her forehead. Skin temperature is not a reliable indicator of actual body temperature. Always confirm fever with a thermometer.

Bathing or sponging with cold water makes the child uncomfortable, and shivering should be avoided because it can make a fever go up.

What Every Parent Should Know About Fever* (Continued)

Never bathe or sponge a child with alcohol, because it can cause alcohol poisoning. Also, don't use ice water enemas to reduce fever for they can cool the body to dangerously low levels and can cause dangerous fluid and electrolyte abnormalities.

Call your doctor immediately for any fever during the first three months of your child's life. In the older child, call your doctor if fever is associated with seizures, abnormal sleepiness, neck pain, rash, changes in the normal breathing pattern, light-headedness, fainting, remarkable irritability, persisting pain, limpness, refusal to use an extremity normally, or if you are unsure whether your child need to be seen.

**Adapted with permission from Kleiman MB.²*

Suggestions for Handling Vaccine Side Effects:

For discomfort and/or elevated temperature, give what your physician has recommended (often Tylenol®). Under normal circumstances, this may be given about every four hours until symptoms disappear.

For swelling and soreness at the infection site, stimulate circulation and absorptions by 1) exercise, 2) intermittent packs with clean warm moist wash cloth, or 3) soaking in a warm tub or shower.

If the side effects cause enough illness to be a concern, please call your physician.

