

Fever, Unknown Etiology, Acute, Child

What is it?

A fever of unknown origin means that there is a fever, but the exact cause for it is not known. We define fever as a rectal temperature over 100.4 degrees F or over 38 degrees C.

What is the cause?

We do not know why your child has a fever. Most of the time fever is due to an infection. Many types of germs can cause infections. These include viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. Sometimes a fever is due to an inflammation somewhere in the body. Sometimes it takes a while for other symptoms to show up. It is very common for a child to have a fever as the only sign of illness. This is especially true in the early stages of an illness.

What are the symptoms?

Your child has a fever. Children with fever may act tired, listless, or irritable. There may be poor appetite. There may be body aches and headache. Your child may look flushed or pale.

How is it treated?

Sometimes an unexplained fever goes away by itself without treatment. We may suggest that you give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen to bring down the fever. These will also make your child more comfortable. Do not give aspirin to a child under 18 unless we tell you to. If the fever lasts, we will probably do tests to find out what is causing it.

What can I expect?

Often new symptoms will show up and help us figure out why fever is present. If we find the cause of the fever, we may prescribe treatment that will help.

In about a quarter of all cases where the cause of a fever is not known, we never do find a reason for it.

What to watch for.

Call us if your child develops new symptoms. Watch for a new headache, vomiting, or a rash. Let us know if your child complains of pain anywhere. Watch for urinary pain or wetting accidents. Let us know if your child begins acting sicker or shows less interest in play or eating. Let us know if your child is hard to wake up. Let us know if your child is not responding as usual to you. Let us know if the child has difficulty breathing.

Instructions:

Do not use aspirin for anyone under 18 year of age.

It may cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

Keep a record of how many times a day your child is urinating.

This is one of the best ways to see if your child is getting enough fluids.

Keep a record of how many wet diapers your baby has a day.

The number of wet diapers will let you know if your baby is getting enough fluids.

Make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids.

Your child should be urinating at least once every 6 hours.

Take your child's temperature every 12 hours or if you feel your child's fever is higher.

Rectal temperatures are more accurate for infants and small children. To take a rectal temperature:

1. Have your child lie face up.
2. Hold your child's legs up by the feet and gently spread the buttocks apart so you can see the rectum.
3. Lubricate the thermometer with a water-based jelly, such as K-Y jelly.
4. Gently slide the thermometer about 1 inch into the rectum. To prevent the thermometer from going further into the rectum, hold onto the thermometer with one hand and your child's legs with your other hand.
5. Keep the thermometer in place for 2 minutes before removing.
6. Write down the temperature.
7. Wash the thermometer in soap and water.

Do not use a rectal thermometer in the mouth.

You can begin to use an oral thermometer when your child is old enough to understand not to bite the thermometer and can be patient enough to sit with a thermometer under the tongue. To take your child's temperature orally:

1. Place the thermometer under your child's tongue toward the back of the mouth.
2. Leave it in place for 2 minutes.
3. Do not let your child drink hot or cold liquids before taking a temperature.
4. Wash the thermometer in soap and water.

Other types of thermometers are available that are easier to use. They may not be as accurate.

There are several ways to treat your child's fever:

A lukewarm sponge bath can be used to help reduce fever. Avoid a tub bath or cool water. These will chill your child and can raise the fever.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) can be give. Do not give aspirin to a child under 18. Avoid over-dressing your child. This can increase the fever. Make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids.

Precautions:

Call Your Physician if:

New symptoms occur.

The fever has not gone away in 2 days.

Your child has frequent vomiting for more than 8 hours and is unable to keep fluids down.

Your child is frequently fussy and hard to comfort.

Your child is having urinary accidents.

Your child's bowel movements become loose or watery.

Your infant does not take a bottle or breast feed at least once every 4 hours.

Seek Immediate Medical Attention if:

Your child has a severe headache that will not go away.

Your child is listless and weak and has trouble staying awake.

Your child shows signs of dehydration.

Your child's temperature is greater than 104F.