

# House Calls

## Fever Facts

By Rikki Schuster, PA-C

If you know how miserable it feels to be both burning hot and freezing cold at the same time, then you remember the last time you had a fever. A fever is a temporary increase in the body's temperature in response to some disease or illness. A person has a fever if their temperature is at or above 99.5 degrees. Fever is an important part of the body's defense against infection. Most bacteria and viruses that cause infections thrive at 98.6 degrees (average normal body temperature). While a fever signals to us that a battle might be going on in the body, the fever is fighting *for* the person, not against. As annoying as a fever is, it is not harmful in and of itself. It just means your body is fighting back.

Almost any infection can cause a fever. Some immunizations will cause fever in children for a day or two, and teething can raise the temperature in children, but usually not over 100 degrees.

A simple cold or another viral infection can sometimes cause a high fever (102-104 degrees), a fever that high does not always mean you have a serious illness. A serious illness can sometimes cause no fever at all. You can often tell if a child's illness is not serious if he is still interested in his normal playing routine, is eating and drinking regularly, is alert and smiles at you, and looks normal once the fever is brought down. You should take steps to lower the fever if you or your child is at all uncomfortable, is vomiting, becoming dehydrated, or not resting well because of the fever. When trying to lower the temperature, do not bundle someone up who is experiencing the chills, in fact, you should remove excess clothing and blankets. Try one lightweight layer of clothing, and one lightweight blanket, the room should be a comfortable temperature, not too hot or too cold. If the room is hot and not well ventilated, a fan may help. A lukewarm bath will help lower your body temperature, but avoid cold or ice baths. This will cause shivering, which will actually raise the body's core temperature, and defeat your efforts. Medications are very effective in lowering temperatures. Both Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) help reduce fever in both

adults and children. Some medical providers recommend alternating the medications to be even more aggressive in lowering the fever. Acetaminophen is usually recommended every four to six hours, and Ibuprofen is taken every 6-8 hours. It is typically not recommended to give Ibuprofen to infants less than six months old. If your child is less than three months old and has a fever, call your pediatrician immediately. Aspirin is effective in treating fever in adults, but aspirin should not be given to children with fever unless specifically instructed by their medical provider. It is very important to get the proper dosing of these fever reducing medications, therefore, always know exactly how much your or your child weighs, and carefully follow the dosing instructions on the package.

Everyone, especially children should drink plenty of fluids when their temperature is elevated. When you have a fever, you tend to get dehydrated much quicker than you normally would, so fluid replacement is essential. It is preferable to avoid caffeinated beverages. Water, popsicles, juices, soups are all good choices. While food intake with a fever is fine, it should not be forced.

A medical provider should be contacted right away if your child:

- 1) Is 3 months old or less and has a rectal temperature more than 100 degrees.
- 2) Is 3-12 months old and has a fever of 102.2 or higher.
- 3) Is under age 2 and has a fever lasting longer than 48-72 hours.
- 4) Is older and has a fever longer than 48-72 hours.
- 5) Has a fever over 105.
- 6) Has other symptoms along with the fever that suggest another illness, like a sore throat, cough, or ear ache, pain with urination, or localized abdominal pain.
- 7) Has had fevers off and on for a week or more even if they aren't that high
- 8) Has a serious medical illness such as a heart problem, diabetes, or an immune system disorder
- 9) Has a new rash, or bruises that appear.
- 10) Has recently traveled to a third world country.

A medical provider should be contacted if you or an adult:

- 1) Have a fever of 105.
- 2) Has a fever that lasts longer than 48-72 hours
- 3) Have had a fever come and go for over a week, even if they weren't very high.
- 4) Have a serious chronic medical illness, such as heart problems, diabetes, chronic lung disease, or immune system disorder
- 5) Have a new rash, or bruises appear
- 6) Have pain with urination or other symptoms that suggest another illness such as localized abdominal pain, productive cough, sore throat
- 7) Have recently traveled to a third world country.

911 should be called if an adult or a child has a fever and:

- 1) Is crying uncontrollably and cannot be calmed down (child)
- 2) Cannot be awakened easily or at all
- 3) Seems confused
- 4) Cannot walk
- 5) Is having difficulty breathing, even after nose is cleared
- 6) Has blue lips, tongue, or nails
- 7) Has a seizure.

The best thing you can do against illness is to try to prevent it. Eat well, get plenty of rest and exercise, and wash your hands frequently during this cold and flu season. By following these simple practices you will hopefully avoid having a fever altogether.

*Rikki Schuster, PA-C is a certified physician assistant with over 14 years of experience practicing medicine. She is currently seeing patients through Medical House Calls, and can be reached by calling 252-475-2007 for appointment information. [www.obxmedicalhousecalls.com](http://www.obxmedicalhousecalls.com)*