Fever

Is fever a friend or a foe? As pediatricians, we are often asked by parents, “What is considered a fever?” and how do I manage it?” Fever is an elevation of body temperature above the normal range of 97.7 - 99.5 degrees F (36.5 – 37.5 degrees C). It is caused by an increase in the body’s regulatory temperature set point. Experts often argue about the usefulness of fever, but in general it is thought to help the person's immune defenses. Many immune reactions are sped up by increased body temperature while some germs are hindered by fever. Core body temperature of 99.5 – 100.4 is considered low grade fever, 100.5 – 103 to be moderate, and greater than 103 is considered high. Fever does not necessarily need to be treated. The main reason is for patient comfort and to bring fever in the range of less than 104.

Medications such as Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen are most commonly used in children (see link for dosing). Aspirin should not be used to treat fever in children or adolescents. As well as a fever reducing medication, a tepid sponge bath may also be used (see below). For infants less than 6 weeks of age and with a temperature of 100.4 F or more, a physician should be consulted immediately. For a child 6 weeks to 3 months, a fever reducer can be given but a physician should again be consulted. For the older child fever can be managed at home with a child who is responding well and is reasonably comfortable and consolable. For worsening or concerning symptoms, especially in unimmunized and under immunized children, consult a physician.

Sponge Bath for a Child's Fever - Topic Overview

A sponge bath may be given if:

- Your child’s fever is 104°F (40°C) or higher and
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen not lowered the temperature and
- Your child is very uncomfortable.

Give your child an appropriate dose of acetaminophen or ibuprofen before giving him or her a sponge bath. Wait 30 minutes to see whether the medicine brings the child's fever below 104°F (40°C).

Give a sponge bath as follows:

- Use lukewarm water [90°F (32.2°C) to 95°F (35°C)] . Do not use cold water, ice, or rubbing alcohol, which will lower the child’s body temperature too quickly.
- Sponge for 20 to 30 minutes.
- Stop if the child starts to shiver.

If your child doesn't like the sponge bath or doesn't feel better after the bath, there is no need to give another one.