



What to do when your child has a fever ?

November 7, 2022

Viruses and other illnesses are very prevalent this fall. Things are even harder because there seems to be a shortage of almost all the things you might use to treat your child at home. Here are some tips for getting through this Winter and Fall.

Taking a temperature and managing a fever

The Canadian Pediatric Society has good outline on [taking a temperature and what to do](#) including all the different types of thermometers

This [great video](#) from the NHS goes over managing fever in a child.

Medications to treat a fever & viral illnesses

Most viruses should be managed at home with simple supportive things. Very few of them need any prescription medications.

Fever - do simple things like not over-wrapping your child but avoid cold cloths and baths (they don't help but often make the child feel worse). Treat the crummy feeling that comes with the fever rather than the number. I know a high fever seems scary but the height of the temperature isn't a good marker of how sick your child is - looking at them will tell you more than the thermometer does. Fevers may help the immune system work better so if your child feels fine, there is no need to treat it. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) are your best choices to treat a fever if you need medications.

Red eyes and discharge - this is almost always viral, especially if your child also has cold symptoms. Despite what the daycare and the

internet tells you "pink eye" does not generally need treatment - 90% of the time it will go away on its own. Over the counter antibiotic drops like Polysporin are not needed. Use warm compresses and artificial tears to reduce the discomfort.

Stuffy and runny nose - Sadly most decongestant medications don't work well in kids but can have risks. That's why they are never available for children under 6. Try things like saline rinsing sprays, a humidifier or the "snot sucker". For older children, [you can consider trying OTC medications](#) but don't be surprised if they don't help much.

Earache - most ear infections are also viral so antibiotics don't help them. The good news is they will go away on their own in 2-3 days. About 30% of ear infection are caused by bacteria and will need antibiotics. Have your child assessed if their earache lasts more than 48-72 hours, if there is discharge from the ear or if your child has had more than 2-3 ear infections in the last year.

Covid - lots of the viral infections we are seeing are caused by covid. Managing covid in your child is very much the same as if the same symptoms are caused by a cold or other virus. [Confused about covid](#) is a great source of information for all things covid including what to do for your child.

How much Tylenol or Advil - what about the shortage ?

These handy charts outline [how much acetaminophen](#) and [how much ibuprofen](#) to give a child - including using adult forms. Almost all acetaminophen and ibuprofen tablets can be crushed and added to something like jam, applesauce or yogurt. Look for forms without special coatings.

If your child is too small for a full acetaminophen or ibuprofen tablet, you may be able to cut them in half. This requires doing some math to make sure you are getting the right dose. Be very careful with your calculations - it is easy to overdose a child. Do not try to cut tablets into smaller amounts - it is too hard to do this accurately. It is always better to use a child specific formulation if it is available. **If you are not sure how much to give your child - ask your pharmacist to help make sure you're doing it right.**

The recommended dose of ibuprofen is 10 mg/kg. That means a 10 kg (22lb) child would need 100 mg. An adult regular strength ibuprofen is 200 mg which means a 22lb child could have 1/2 an adult regular strength tablet.

The recommended dose of acetaminophen is 10-15 mg/kg. That means a 15 kg (33lb) child would need 130-225 mg. An adult regular strength acetaminophen is 325 mg. Half of that tablet is 162.5mg which is right in that range. So a 33 lb child could have 1/2 of an adult regular tablet.

Does all that calculating confuse you? Not sure if it is safe to cut the adult pills you have? **Talk to your nurse practitioner, doctor or pharmacist for advice.** Pharmacists are great at this! Just make sure you have a fairly recent and fairly accurate weight for your child.

When should my child see a doctor?

Most of the time you can manage this at home and your doctor won't be able to do anything more to help. You should have your child assessed if:

- Any child with a fever under 6 weeks of age
- If your child has a fever lasting 72 hours or more
- If your child has an earache lasting more than 48-72 hours
- If your child is struggling to breath or is really out of breath
- If your child is not eating or drinking. It's very normal to eat less when sick. Liquids are more important than food during this time

If you're not sure what to do, check out health Connect Ontario which has a [symptom checker](#), [live chat with a nurse](#) or you can [call 811 to be connected](#) with a nurse 24 hours a day.

- Courtesy of Norfolk Family Medical (<https://norfolkfamilymedical.ca/updates/f/what-to-do-if-your-child-has-a-fever-or-viral-illness?target=parent>)