



CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE RESOURCE NETWORK

If this is a possible life-threatening illness or injury, call 911 immediately.

SickKid.Net is committed to assisting you with a variety of health information and resources for your children. Our organization is dedicated to helping you with sick childcare needs, when you need it most.

Children's Hospital Spotlight

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## A Parent's Guide to



## Minor Illnesses and Injuries

Sometimes it may feel like parenthood is about navigating your child through a course of bumps and bruises and tummy aches and fevers. Being informed about the most common illnesses and injuries and how to care for your child in an emergency will make that course a little easier.

There's no substitute for the expertise of your child's doctor, and you should always seek his or her advice when it comes to treatments and diagnoses for your child's specific illnesses and injuries. Check out the information below to help you decide what's normal, what's not, and when to pick up the phone to call your child's doctor.

### Inform Yourself About Illnesses

Illnesses that cause fever, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, and abdominal pain are common in childhood. In most cases these symptoms of illness don't indicate an emergency, but you should always call your child's doctor if you are concerned about your child's health. If you feel your child needs immediate medical treatment, don't hesitate to head to the nearest emergency room.

**Fever:** A fever is a symptom of an illness, not a disease itself. When taken orally, a normal temperature is about 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Many doctors consider a fever to be a temperature higher than 99.4 degrees Fahrenheit.

If your baby is under 1 month old, call your child's doctor if your baby's rectal temperature goes above 100.4 degrees, even if he or she doesn't have other symptoms. If your baby is 1 to 3 months old, call your child's doctor if your baby's temperature is 101.4 or higher or if your baby has had a temperature of at least 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 24 hours. If your child is older than 3 months, call your child's doctor if the fever rises above 101.4 degrees Fahrenheit or if your child has a fever for more than 3 days. If your child is 3 months to 2 years of age, call your child's doctor if your child's fever rises over 103 degrees Fahrenheit.

Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) can be used to lower a child's fever. Never give aspirin to a child because it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome. Use the weight and age guidelines on the product packaging, and never give your child more frequent doses than recommended by the manufacturer unless instructed by your child's doctor. Other remedies for fever include having your child rest quietly in a cool room and offering plenty of liquids to prevent dehydration.

If your child has symptoms such as behavior changes, severe headache, stiff neck, irritability, stomach pain, high-pitched crying, earache, lack of hunger, or a rash in addition to fever, call your child's doctor right away.

**Vomiting and Diarrhea:** There are many reasons that a child may have diarrhea (when stools are watery or much more frequent or both) or may vomit (when stomach contents are regurgitated through the mouth), such as bacterial or viral infections, allergies, food intolerances, reactions to medications, or parasites. If your child vomits or has diarrhea once or twice and seems otherwise normal, you probably

don't need to call your child's doctor. To prevent dehydration, feed your child bland clear liquids such as broth, flat soda, water, juice, and gelatin. Your child's doctor may also recommend an oral rehydration solution, such as Pedialyte.

Call your child's doctor if your child has:

- Persistent and frequent vomiting or diarrhea
- Extreme drowsiness or lethargy
- Fever
- Blood in the vomit or stool
- Persistent abdominal pain

Signs of dehydration, such as sunken eyes, dry skin or mouth, no tears when crying, or urinating less than usual

**Coughing:** In children, coughing usually occurs as part of a cold when nasal secretions irritate the throat. Coughs often last longer than other cold symptoms, so don't be surprised if you're still hearing your child cough even when other cold symptoms have disappeared. Since dry air often worsens coughs, use a vaporizer or humidifier in your child's room to keep his or her air passages moist. Offer your child warm liquids to soothe the throat, and avoid exposing your child to tobacco smoke because it worsens coughs.

- Call your child's doctor if your child:
  - Has fast or labored breathing
  - Has chest pain
  - Vomits after coughing
  - Has a cough lasting more than 3 weeks

**Abdominal Pain:** If your child has abdominal pain, it may be caused by overeating, gas, constipation, appendicitis, stomach infection, or food poisoning. Resting in bed and a diet of clear fluids may help to settle your child's stomach. If your child's abdominal pain is accompanied by fever and has lasted more than an hour, call your child's doctor.

Call your child's doctor or seek immediate treatment if your child:

- Has increasing pain
- Begins to vomit blood or have blood in the stool
- Has difficulty walking
- Has pain in the scrotum or testicle
- Is out of breath
- Is having difficulty urinating
- Has a swollen abdomen

## Understanding Injuries

Broken bones and head trauma are common childhood injuries. Monitor your child's condition closely, and watch for any changes in your child's pain level or alertness.

**Head Injuries:** About 300,000 children visit doctor's offices or emergency departments each year because of head injuries, and although most of them don't require

short-term or long-term treatment, they are still frightening events to both parents and children. If your child has had a head injury, observe his or her level of consciousness in the hours following the injury.

If your child shows signs of shock or has an injury to the neck or back, don't move your child; call 911 for emergency medical treatment.

Call your child's doctor or get immediate treatment if your child:

- Is unconscious
- Is not breathing
- Is bleeding profusely
- Has bruising around an eye or behind an ear
- Has pupils of unequal size
- Has bloody or clear discharge from ears or nose
- Seems confused or lethargic
- Vomits more than once
- Has a speech difficulty, paralysis, memory loss, or convulsion

Broken Bones: A fracture, also known as a broken bone, often occurs when a child is playing or participating in sports. If you suspect your child has broken a bone, immobilize the injured and apply ice to reduce swelling. How can you tell the difference between a sprain or a fracture? Your best bet is to get medical treatment or an X-ray, but signs of a broken bone include:

- Difficulty moving the limb or joint
- Sensitivity, discoloration, or cold feeling
- A bone that pierces the skin and is bleeding

If your child shows signs of shock or has an injury to the neck or back, don't move your child; call 911 for emergency medical treatment.

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