

Evaluating Your Child's Fever

Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Women & Children's Hospital of Buffalo

The causes of fever are many and varied. Most commonly in children, fevers are a normal response to minor viral and bacterial infections such as common colds or ear infections.

As an adult, you have been exposed to and fought off many infections over the years and your immune system has built up defenses that fight off similar infections. Your child hasn't had that experience yet so they are still working on building up those defenses. When parents say their children seem sick "all of the time" that is actually not far from normal. In certain studies it is "normal" for children to have 5-8 common cold-type infections per year and 2-4 diarrheal illnesses per year. All of these can have associated fever and, at times can last 1-2 weeks. Adding this up to the extreme equals 24 weeks of illness being within the norm. Some children fair better and some worse, yet all would be considered to have normal immune systems.

Other causes of fever are somewhat more rare and include medicine reactions, inflammatory disorders such as rheumatic fever or lupus, inflammatory bowel disease, and periodic fever syndromes. Cancer does not usually cause intermittent fevers (they tend to be more persistent) and usually are associated with other more worrisome signs, such as weight loss, night sweats, morning vomiting that relieves a headache, or large rubbery lymph nodes. Of the periodic fever syndromes, PFAPA is one of the more common; it stands for Periodic Fever, Adenopathy (swollen nodes), Pharyngitis (red throat) and Aphthous stomatitis (mouth sores). Other than the concerning symptoms, this disorder has not been associated with long-term adverse outcomes.

We have provided you with this information sheet and 3 marked sheets that can be converted into a 3-month calendar. Please keep a fever diary marking the days of fever and any other associated signs. You can mark on the calendar with the below code (or similar) and take notes on back of each months sheet. Your doctor may also ask that you take a daily afternoon temperature and that can be marked on here as well.

- + Fever
- D Diarrhea
- B Blood in stools
- R Rashes
- J Joint swelling/redness (knees/ankles/wrist/fingers)
- E Eyes red/vision disturbances
- N Nodes Swollen (neck, upper chest, behind knees/elbows, diaper region)
- S Sores in mouth, other areas

After the 3 month data collection, please review this sheet with your pediatrician by phone or visit. After you and your pediatrician review the course, if there is still a concern, have your pediatrician contact us to set up an immediate appointment (usually within 1-2 weeks). Sometimes, when we start tracking, fevers "go away" so if you and your pediatrician are reassured there may be no need to see us. If you are concerned at any time during this fever tracking period, please contact your pediatrician.
