

# What It Takes to Get Rid of Fever, Headaches and Stomachaches

Fevers, headaches and stomachaches are common complaints of illness in children. While these may not be life-threatening, it is important to know what you can do to help a child.

## **FEVER**

Fever is the body's reaction to infection and illness. In addition to making a child uncomfortable, a fever can increase heart and respiratory rates, and can result in dehydration. Normal body temperatures vary slightly from child to child. The average normal body temperature is 98.6°F.

It is sometimes a challenge to evaluate a child's temperature. Some children have a normal temperature, especially in the afternoon, of 99°F or higher. The method of temperature measurement can also affect the results; an oral or ear measurement is usually a little higher than a measurement taken under the arm.

Most school systems will send a child home if he has a temperature of 100°F or higher. When a child has a fever, you might:

- Offer him cool water to drink
- Remove heavy clothing
- Apply lukewarm or slightly cool cloths to his head, neck or back
- Give him acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) if it is within school policy and the parents have given permission

Digital thermometers give an accurate reading if a child is old enough to hold it in his mouth, with his lips closed. When taking an oral temperature, a child should not have had anything to eat or drink for 15 to 20 minutes, and should not have candy or gum in his mouth.

Here are some tips for using a digital thermometer:

- Make sure it is clear of any old readings
- Never leave a child unattended while taking his temperature
- Use a new plastic shield for each child
- Wait until the digital thermometer beeps for an accurate reading

If a child is coughing a lot, or breathing through his mouth because of a stuffy nose, it would be better to take his temperature under his arm. To take a temperature this way, the thermometer should be placed directly on the skin of his armpit. An underarm temperature tends to be slightly lower than an oral temperature.

The newer tympanic (ear) thermometers may be as accurate, but require some training to use properly.

## HEADACHES

Headaches can be a painful and frustrating problem for children. Little is known about the causes of headaches in children. Some triggers include:

- Lack of sleep
- Tension
- Migraine
- Medication side effects
- Sinus pressure
- Vision problems
- Hunger
- Infections

Nausea is not uncommon in children with headaches. However, here are some things that should be immediately reported to parents, so they can obtain further medical evaluation:

- Unexplained or recurring headaches
- Vomiting
- Decreased alertness
- Vision changes
- Weakness
- Fevers

Children can also have true migraines.

Lying down in a dark room can be helpful until a child's symptoms pass, or until medication can be given by parents or school personnel.

## STOMACHACHES

For children, the occasional stomachache is a part of growing up. For adults, a stomachache is probably the most frustrating of all the childhood illnesses because there are so many causes. Possible causes of stomachaches include:

- Gastrointestinal illness
- Tension
- Stress
- Constipation
- Hunger
- Food

If a child complains of a stomachache, ask him if he had breakfast or suggest he try using the restroom. Sometimes a brief rest period will help, especially if vomiting or diarrhea is not present.

If a child does start vomiting, this can be frightening and exhausting for him. A child needs reassurance he will be OK. Parents should be called to pick him up, especially if he vomits more than once. A child who has been vomiting should not be given anything to drink for at least 30 minutes, but he may rinse his mouth out. Sips of water or ice chips can be offered after he has rested.

If a child has had diarrhea, he may also have abdominal cramping. He can be given clear liquids to drink and should be allowed to go home.

Frequent stomachaches should be reported to parents, who can consult with a child's doctor.

Careful hand washing is the most important way to limit the spread of illnesses. Careful cleaning of any accidents should follow school procedure.

*A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS. In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.*

*This is general information and is not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.*