

# What to Do When Your Child Is Vomiting

When your child throws up (vomits), it's normal to be concerned or worried. But vomiting is usually not due to a major health problem. Vomiting is most often caused by viral infection or food poisoning. It often lasts only 1 or 2 days. The biggest concern when your child is vomiting is that their body will lose too much fluid (dehydration). This sheet tells you what you can do to help your child feel better and stay hydrated.



## How is vomiting treated at home?

- **Stomach rest.** Keep your child from eating or drinking for 30 to 60 minutes after vomiting. This gives your child's stomach a chance to recover.
- **Replacing fluids.** Dehydration can be a problem when your child is vomiting. Start replacing fluids after your child hasn't vomited for 30 to 60 minutes. To do this:
  - Wait until your child feels well enough to ask for a drink. Don't force your child to drink if they still feel unwell. And don't wake your child to drink if he or she is sleeping.
  - Start by giving your child very small amounts (1/2 oz or less) of fluid every 5 to 10 minutes. Use a teaspoon instead of a glass to give fluids.
  - Use water or another clear, noncarbonated liquid. Breastmilk may be given if your child is breastfeeding.
  - If your child vomits the fluid, wait at least another 30 minutes. Then start again with a very small amount of fluid every 5 to 10 minutes.
  - If your child is having trouble swallowing liquids, offer frozen juice bars (without pieces of fruit) or ice chips.
  - Oral rehydration solution may be used if your child is dehydrated from repeated vomiting. You can buy rehydration solution at your local grocery store or pharmacy. Stay away from sports drinks. They have too much sugar.
- **Solid food.** If your child is hungry and asking for food, try giving small amounts of a bland food. This includes crackers, dry cereal, rice, or noodles. Avoid giving your child greasy, fatty, or spicy foods for a few days as your child recovers.

- **Medicines.** If your child has a fever, ask your healthcare provider if you can give an over-the-counter medicine, such as acetaminophen. These medicines may also be available in suppository form if your child is still vomiting. Talk with your pharmacist to learn more. Don't give your child aspirin to relieve a fever. Using aspirin to treat a fever in children could cause a serious condition called Reye syndrome. Also, ibuprofen isn't approved for infants under 6 months of age. If the vomiting doesn't stop, your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine (called an antiemetic) to help with upset stomach and vomiting.

## When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call your child's healthcare provider right away if your otherwise healthy child has any of the following:

- Fever (see "Fever and children" below)
- Vomiting several times an hour for a few hours
- Bloody vomit
- Greenish vomit (contains bile)
- Stomach pain
- Uncontrolled retching (without any vomit)
- Vomiting after taking prescription medicine
- Very forceful vomiting (projectile vomiting)
- Bloody diarrhea

Symptoms of dehydration

- Listless or lethargic behavior or increased sleeping
- No pee for 6 to 8 hours or very dark pee
- Child refuses fluids for 6 to 8 hours
- Dry mouth or sunken eyes, lack of tears

## Fever and children

Use a digital thermometer to check your child's temperature. Don't use a mercury thermometer. There are different kinds and uses of digital thermometers. They include:

- **Rectal.** For children younger than 3 years old, a rectal temperature is the most accurate.
- **Forehead (temporal).** This works for children age 3 months and older. If a child under 3 months old has signs of illness, this can be used for a first pass. The provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.
- **Ear (tympanic).** Ear temperatures are accurate after 6 months of age, but not before.

- **Armpit (axillary).** This is the least reliable but may be used for a first pass to check a child of any age with signs of illness. The provider may want to confirm with a rectal temperature.
- **Mouth (oral).** Don't use a thermometer in your child's mouth until they are at least 4 years old.

Use the rectal thermometer with care. Follow the product maker's directions for correct use. Insert it gently. Label it and make sure it's not used in the mouth. It may pass on germs from the stool. If you don't feel OK using a rectal thermometer, ask the healthcare provider what type to use instead. When you talk with any healthcare provider about your child's fever, tell them which type you used.

Below are guidelines to know if your young child has a fever. Your child's healthcare provider may give you different numbers for your child. Follow your provider's specific instructions.

**Fever readings for a baby under 3 months old:**

- First, ask your child's healthcare provider how you should take the temperature.
- Rectal or forehead: 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Armpit: 99°F (37.2°C) or higher

**Fever readings for a child age 3 months to 36 months (3 years):**

- Rectal, forehead, or ear: 102°F (38.9°C) or higher
- Armpit: 101°F (38.3°C) or higher

**Call the healthcare provider in these cases:**

- Repeated temperature of 104°F (40°C) or higher in a child of any age
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher in baby younger than 3 months
- Fever that lasts more than 24 hours in a child under age 2
- Fever that lasts for 3 days in a child age 2 or older