

Sick baby? When to Seek Medical Attention

When a healthy baby gets sick, don't panic. Understand when to call the doctor and when to seek emergency care for your baby.

[By Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

When you have a baby occasional infections and fevers are inevitable. But even parents who have experience with sick babies can have trouble distinguishing normal fussiness and mild illnesses from serious problems. Here's when to contact the doctor — and when to seek emergency care — for a sick baby.

When to contact your baby's doctor

An occasional illness is usually nothing to worry about in an otherwise healthy baby — but sometimes it's best to contact the doctor. Look for these signs and symptoms:

- **Changes in appetite.** If your baby refuses several feedings in a row or eats poorly, contact the doctor.
- **Changes in behavior.** If your baby is hard to awaken or unusually sleepy, tell the doctor right away. Let the doctor know if your baby is extremely floppy, crying more than usual or very hard to console.
- **Tender navel or penis.** Contact the doctor if your baby's umbilical area or penis suddenly becomes red or starts to ooze or bleed.
- **Fever.** If your baby is younger than 3 months old, contact the doctor for any fever.
 - If your baby is *3 to 6 months old* and has a temperature up to 102 F (38.9 C) and seems sick or has a temperature higher than 102 F (38.9 C), contact the doctor.
 - If your baby is *6 to 24 months old* and has a temperature higher than 102 F (38.9 C) that lasts longer than one day but shows no other signs or symptoms, contact the doctor. If your baby also has other signs or symptoms — such as a cold, cough or diarrhea — you might contact the doctor sooner based on their severity.
 - If your baby has a fever that lasts for *more than 3 days*, contact the doctor.
- **Diarrhea.** Contact the doctor if your baby's stools are especially loose or watery.
- **Vomiting.** Occasional spitting up, the easy flow of a baby's stomach contents through his or her mouth, is normal. Vomiting occurs when the flow is forceful — shooting out inches rather than dribbling from the mouth. Contact the doctor if your baby vomits forcefully after feedings or your baby hasn't been able to keep liquids down for eight hours.
- **Dehydration.** Contact the doctor if your baby cries with fewer tears, has significantly fewer wet diapers or has a dry mouth. Also contact the doctor if your baby's soft spot appears sunken.
- **Constipation.** If your baby has fewer bowel movements than usual for a few days and appears to be struggling or uncomfortable, contact the doctor.
- **Colds.** Contact the doctor if your baby has a cold that interferes with his or her breathing, has nasal mucus that lasts longer than 10 to 14 days, has ear pain or has a cough that lasts more than one week.
- **Rash.** Contact the doctor if a rash appears infected or if your baby suddenly develops an unexplained rash — especially if it's accompanied by a fever.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/healthy-baby/art-20047793>

Sick baby? When to Seek Medical Attention

- **Eye discharge.** If one or both eyes are red or leaking mucus, contact the doctor.

When to seek emergency care

Seek emergency care for:

- Bleeding that can't be stopped
- Poisoning
- Seizures
- Increasing difficulty breathing
- Any change in consciousness, confusion, a bad headache or vomiting several times after a head injury
- Unconsciousness, acting strangely or becoming more withdrawn and less alert
- Large or deep cuts or burns or smoke inhalation
- Skin or lips that look blue, purple or gray
- Increasing or severe persistent pain
- Major mouth or facial injuries
- Near drowning

Prepare for emergencies in advance by asking your baby's doctor during a checkup what to do and where to go if your baby needs emergency care. Learn basic first aid, including CPR, and keep emergency phone numbers and addresses handy.

Be ready to answer questions

Be prepared to help the medical staff understand what's happening with your baby. Expect questions about:

- **Your baby's symptoms.** What prompted you to seek medical attention for your baby? What are your specific concerns?
- **Your baby's medical history.** Does your baby have any known allergies? Are your baby's immunizations current? Does your baby have any chronic conditions? Be prepared to share details about your pregnancy and the baby's birth.
- **Changes in your baby's feeding and bowel movements.** Have you noticed changes in your baby's eating or drinking patterns, in the number of wet diapers, or in the number, volume or consistency of bowel movements?
- **Changes in your baby's temperature.** What's your baby's temperature? How did you take it and at what time?
- **Home remedies and medications.** Have you tried any home remedies or given your baby any over-the-counter or prescription medications? If so, what, how much and when? If you suspect your child ingested poison or medications, bring the bottle with you.
- **Possible exposures.** Is anyone ill among your household contacts or, if relevant, at your baby's child care center? Have you traveled with your baby recently?

Before you contact your baby's doctor, make sure you're prepared to jot down any instructions. Have your pharmacy's contact information ready, too.

Being prepared will save you and your baby's doctor time during a phone call, office visit or emergency situation.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/healthy-baby/art-20047793>