

What is a urinary tract infection?

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the bladder and sometimes the kidneys. If the bladder is infected, it is called cystitis. If the kidneys are infected, it is called pyelonephritis. It is important to treat UTIs so that the kidneys are not damaged. Various symptoms are possible:

- painful urination
- an urgent need to urinate
- frequent urination
- daytime and nighttime wetting
- dribbling
- foul-smelling urine
- fever
- stomachaches (especially lower abdomen)
- vomiting.

What is the cause?

Urinary tract infections are caused by bacteria. The bacteria enter the bladder by traveling up the urethra. In general, the urethra is protected, but if the opening of the urethra (or the vulva in girls) becomes irritated, bacteria can grow there. Common irritants are bubble bath and shampoos. Careless wiping after a bowel movement might also cause irritation. A rare cause of UTIs (1% of girls and 5% of boys) is obstruction of the urinary tract, which results in incomplete emptying of the bladder. Children who delay going to the bathroom are more likely to develop UTIs. Children who start and stop their stream of urine while they are going to the bathroom are more likely to get a UTI.

How long does it last?

With treatment, your child's fever should be gone and symptoms should be better by 48 hours after starting the antibiotic. The chances of getting another UTI are about 50%. Read the advice on preventing UTIs to decrease your child's risk.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Antibiotics**

Your child's antibiotic is _____. Your child's dose is _____ given _____ times a day during waking hours for _____ days. This medicine will kill the bacteria that are causing the UTI.

If the medicine is liquid, store it in the refrigerator and shake the bottle well before you measure a dose. Use a measuring spoon to be sure that you give the right amount.

Try not to forget any of the doses. If your child goes to school or a baby sitter, arrange for someone to give the afternoon dose. Give the medicine until all the pills are gone or the bottle is empty. Even though your child will feel better in a few days, give the antibiotic for the full 10 days to keep the UTI from flaring up again.

- **Extra fluids**

Encourage your child to drink extra fluids to help clear the infection.

- **Fever and pain relief**

Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for the painful urination or for fever over 102°F (39°C).

- **Medical follow-up**

Two days after your child begins antibiotics, it is important to contact your child's healthcare provider to find out the results of the urine culture and make sure that your child's symptoms are responding to the antibiotic.

About 2 weeks after treatment is started, return to your healthcare provider. They will recheck your child and may suggest another urine culture to make sure the UTI is cured.

- **Instructions for collecting a midstream, clean-catch urine specimen at home**

If you are asked to bring a urine sample to your provider's office, try to collect the urine when your child first urinates in the morning. Use a jar and lid that has been sterilized by boiling for 10 minutes.

Wash the genital area several times with cotton balls and warm water. Your child should then sit on the toilet seat with her legs spread widely so that the labia (skin folds of the vagina) don't touch. After she starts to urinate into the toilet, place the clean container directly in line with the stream of urine. Remove it after you have collected a few ounces but before she stops urinating. (The first or last drops that come out of the bladder may be contaminated with bacteria from the skin instead of the urinary tract.)