

Urinary tract infections

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are very common in children. The urinary tract is made up of the kidneys, ureters (tubes that move urine from kidney to the bladder), bladder, and urethra (a tube connects the bladder to the genitals). An infection can happen anywhere along this tract, but they are most common in the kidneys and bladder. An infection of the bladder is called cystitis, while an infection involving the kidney is called pyelonephritis, or “pyelo”.

Most UTIs are caused by a bacteria called *Escherichia coli* (E. coli), but there are also other bacteria that can sometimes cause a UTI.

Are some children at higher risk for urinary tract infections?

UTIs are more common in girls than in boys. A girl's urethra is short so bacteria can easily get into the bladder. Children with a urinary system that is abnormal are also more at risk for a UTI.

How do I know if my child has a urinary tract infection?

Young infants and children who have a UTI may be irritable or have a fever for no apparent reason.

Older children might also:

- feel pain or a burning sensation when peeing,
- feel a strong urge to pee or need to pee more often than usual, or start having small accidents well after toilet learning is complete,
- have a fever,
- feel pain in the lower back or pain in the belly just below the navel,

- have foul-smelling urine that can look cloudy or have a little blood.

How will my doctor test for a urinary tract infection?

To diagnose a UTI, your doctor will need one or two urine samples to see if there is inflammation or bacteria. Urine collected for bacteria needs to be free of skin or stool contamination. How you provide the sample may depend on your child's age:

- If you have an infant, a doctor or nurse may use a catheter (small tube inserted into the urethra) so urine can be collected in a sterile bag for testing. This is the best way to test for a UTI.
- If your child is toilet-trained, they will need to provide a mid-stream urine sample in a sterile cup or jar. "Mid-stream" means that the child pees a little bit and then you collect the urine.

How is a urinary tract infection treated?

UTIs are treated with antibiotics. If your child is younger than 2 years old and has a UTI, your doctor may do additional tests to be sure your child's urinary tract is working properly.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your doctor if your child:

- is under 6 months old and has a fever,
- is older than 6 months and has had a fever for more than 48 hours,
- is in pain when urinating, or has foul-smelling urine,
- has suddenly started having accidents during the day or at night time after many months of being dry,
- has blood in the urine, and/or
- has severe stomach or back pain.

How can I prevent my child from getting a urinary tract infection?

- Teach your child to use the toilet when they feel the urge and not to hold it. Urine that is held in the bladder can help bacteria grow. This is also important for bowel movements.
- Children with constipation are more prone to UTIs. If your child has hard stools or painful bowel movements, try to increase the fibre in their diet. If this does not work, speak to your doctor.
- Avoid bubble baths and washing with strong soaps that can cause irritation.

Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Community Paediatrics Committee
- Infectious Diseases and Immunization Committee

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