

Febrile seizures

What is a febrile seizure?

A febrile seizure is a seizure caused by a fever. They can occur when your child has a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher. A febrile seizure can be scary to see. If your child is having a febrile seizure, you may notice:

- Their eyes looking off to the side or up
- Their head, arms, and/or legs shaking
- They are unresponsive (not looking at you and/or responding to your voice or directions)
- Their whole body becomes stiff
- They briefly become limp and close their eyes (lose consciousness)

These are the most common signs of a febrile seizure. However, if you notice any other unusual movements, twitches, or behaviour from your child when they have a fever, seek medical advice.

Febrile seizures usually last from 30 seconds to 2 minutes. They can also be as short as a few seconds or last for more than 15 minutes.

What should I do if my child is having a febrile seizure?

If your child has a febrile seizure, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that you do the following:

- Stay as calm as you can and note the time the seizure started
- Place your child on a flat surface on their side. This is to protect their airway in case they vomit (throw up)
- Do not move them unless they are in danger or near something dangerous
- Do not hold them down

- Wipe away any vomit or saliva outside the child's mouth, but do not put anything in their mouth
- After the seizure stops, keep your child on their side
- Allow your child to sleep after the seizure and wake them up gradually
- Call 9-1-1 if:
 - The seizure lasts longer than 3 minutes
 - Your child is younger than 6 months
 - Your child has trouble breathing or their face starts to turn blue
 - Your child has 2 or more febrile seizures in 24 hours

If your child has had a seizure, even a brief one, you should take them to their health care provider to determine the cause of the seizure.

How serious is a febrile seizure?

Most febrile seizures stop on their own and don't cause other health problems. If your child has had a febrile seizure, it does not mean that they have or will have a seizure disorder (epilepsy).

What can cause a febrile seizure?

Febrile seizures can happen with any condition that causes a fever. Conditions that can cause a fever include common childhood illnesses such as a cold, the flu, an ear infection, or roseola.

Who is most likely to have a febrile seizure?

Febrile seizures occur in children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years. About 2-5% of children will have a febrile seizure during

childhood. A child is more likely to have a febrile seizure if a family member (parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister) has had one. About 1 in 3 children who have a febrile seizure will have another one. The older the child is when they have a febrile seizure the less likely they are to have another.

Can febrile seizures be prevented?

Febrile seizures cannot usually be prevented. Fever can be reduced by medications such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen, but this has not been shown to prevent febrile seizures. Oral medication must not be given to a child during a seizure to avoid the risk of choking.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen* (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

For more information on Reye syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

For more information

For information on taking a temperature, see [HealthLinkBC File #99 How to take a temperature: Children and adults](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority