

Fever and Neutropenia

Fever and neutropenia is a common complication of cancer treatment. Because of your child's increased risk of infection, it is very important to call your health care provider right away if your child has a fever.

Fever is considered a temperature of 38.5° C (101.3 F) or higher, or 38.0° C (100.4° F) or higher twice within a 24-hour period.

Neutropenia is a decrease in the infection-fighting white blood cells called **neutrophils**. If your child has an absolute neutrophil count (ANC) of less than 500 and a fever, treatment with IV antibiotics will be started.

When your child is neutropenic, the following **signs and symptoms** may indicate infection:

- Increased skin temperature
- Feeling tired
- Body aches
- Shaking chills
- Cough or shortness of breath
- Redness, swelling, or warmth at the site of an injury, surgical wound or IV site
- Abdominal pain
- Mouth sores
- Diarrhea/rectal discomfort with bowel movement
- Feeling dizzy, confused or weak

What to do:

- Check temperature orally, in the ear or under the arm, **never rectally!**
- **Do not give any fever reducing medicine until you have spoken to your health care provider.**
- If your child's temperature is 38.5° C (101.3° F) or higher, or 38.0° C (100.4° F) twice in 24 hours, **call the clinic or on call MD immediately.** Your child needs to be seen by a health care provider **as soon as possible.**
- If your child has a port-a-cath, put EMLA cream on the port before leaving for the clinic or ED. Your child will be accessed for blood work and antibiotics. Our goal is that your child will receive IV antibiotics within **one hour** of contact in the clinic or ED (90 minutes if we are waiting for blood work to confirm neutropenia). Therefore, IV access as quickly as possible will be a priority.

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During clinic hours, call the Jimmy Fund Clinic and ask to speak to the triage nurse. You must arrive by 3pm to be seen in clinic. After 3 pm you will be sent directly to the Emergency Department (ED). After clinic hours, page the on call pediatric oncology fellow by calling the page operator.

What happens if my child develops fever and neutropenia?

If your child develops a fever when the ANC is less than 500, your child will be admitted to the hospital for IV antibiotics. In the emergency room or clinic, blood will be drawn to check for bacteria and your child will be evaluated for infection. While in the hospital, your child will receive IV antibiotics until the ANC increases (even if the fever goes away).

When can we go home?

The antibiotics are discontinued, and discharge from the hospital is possible when:

- Your child has had no fever for 24 hours
- The ANC is steadily rising
- There are no other signs of infection and your child appears well

Other factors, such as pain or being unable to eat or drink, may keep your child in the hospital longer, even if the blood counts have recovered. When you go home after a hospital stay for fever and neutropenia, please continue to follow these precautions:

- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Use good hand washing
- Call your health care provider if a fever or any other signs of infection return

Contact Us

For patient care assistance, please call the following phone numbers:

- Jimmy Fund Clinic (617) 632-3270
Business Hours 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday
- Page Operator (617) 632-3352
Off hours: weekdays after 5 p.m., holidays, and weekends
Page pediatric hematology/oncology fellow on call
- Life Threatening Emergencies dial 911