

# Urinary Tract Infections in Children

## What is a urinary tract infection?

Urinary tract infections are the most common of all bacterial infections and occur when bacteria grow in the bladder, kidneys, ureters, or urethra. If not treated, urinary tract infections (UTIs) may cause serious, possibly life-threatening problems and permanent damage to the urinary tract. After 6 months of age, girls tend to have more UTIs than boys.

Repeated UTIs in infants and children often indicate a problem with the shape or structure of the urinary tract. Structural problems may require special treatment and long-term steps to prevent permanent kidney injury.

## What is the cause of a urinary tract infection?

Bacteria that enter the urethra and travel up the urinary tract usually cause urinary tract infections. Bubble baths and shampoos are common irritants, as well as bacteria that normally live in the large intestine and are present in feces. Occasionally kidney or bladder infections are caused by bacteria traveling through the blood or lymph system to the urinary tract.

An associated cause of UTIs is obstruction of the urinary tract, which results in incomplete emptying of the bladder.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms in infants are less specific than in older children and may include: fever, increased irritability, poor feeding, lethargy, abdominal distention, vomiting, diarrhea, or urinary retention.

Older children may have the following symptoms: fever, irritability, lack of appetite, foul-smelling urine, an urgent need to urinate, day and nighttime wetting, vomiting, and stomachaches.

## How is a urinary tract infection treated?

Most UTIs clear up quickly with antibiotics and home treatment. Goals of the treatment are to relieve symptoms, eliminate the infection, and prevent kidney damage. The fever and symptoms should be better in 48 hours after starting the antibiotic. Unfortunately the chances of getting another UTI is about 50%.

An untreated bladder infection may cause a kidney infection, which is cured in 10 to 14 days of medication and home treatment. Younger children are more prone to develop kidney damage (scarring) after infection. Therefore, early diagnosis with proper treatment in children is very important.

Home treatment includes drinking lots of water, along with cranberry or blueberry juice. This will help to make the urine less concentrated and wash out the bacteria causing infection. Help your child urinate frequently and empty their bladder completely each time.

## How can a urinary tract infection be prevented?

- ❖ When your child bathes, wash the genital area with water, not soap.
- ❖ Don't put bubble bath, shampoo, or other soaps into the bath water; they can be very irritating.
- ❖ Keep bath time less than 15 minutes.
- ❖ Teach your daughter to wipe herself from front to back, especially after a bowel movement.
- ❖ Try to not let your child become constipated.
- ❖ Encourage your child to drink enough fluids each day to keep the urine light-colored.
- ❖ Encourage your child to urinate at least every 3 to 4 hours during the day.
- ❖ Teach your child not to strain or push hard while urinating, but to empty the bladder smoothly.
- ❖ Keep the tip of the penis clean, especially in uncircumcised boys.