

Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Aug 20, 2021

Urinary tract infections in children

Urinary tract infections are usually easy to treat, but they can be hard to spot. Your child might seem to be sick for no obvious reason.

A urinary tract infection can damage your child's kidneys, so it's important to see a doctor if you're worried. Urinary tract infections can be very dangerous in very young babies, so you should always seek medical help if you think your baby might have one.

What are urinary tract infections in children?

A urinary tract infection (often called a UTI) is caused by germs (usually bacteria) growing in the parts of your child's body that carry urine. The infection can affect your child's bladder or kidneys, or the tubes that carry urine. Kidney infections are more serious than bladder infections.

Certain things can increase a child's chance of getting a urinary tract infection, including:

- being under 1 year old
- being a girl, and
- having problems with their urinary tract.

At least 8 in every 100 girls and 2 in every 100 boys will have had a urinary tract infection by the time they are 7 years old.

What are the symptoms?

It's often hard to tell if a child has a urinary tract infection, especially if they are very young and can't describe how they are feeling. Symptoms can include:

- a high temperature (fever)
- being irritable or fussy
- vomiting, and
- diarrhea
- loss of appetite

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- cloudy or strange-smelling urine, and
- either have difficulty urinating or needing to urinate a lot.

If your child is older and can describe their symptoms, they may say they have pain in their upper tummy (abdomen), back, or sides, or pain when they urinate.

Your doctor can find out whether your child has a urinary tract infection by testing a sample of their urine.

What treatments work?

Most children with a urinary tract infection can be treated easily with antibiotics.

If you think your child has a urinary tract infection you should see your doctor right away. Untreated urinary tract infections can be dangerous in young children.

In very young babies, urinary tract infections can lead to **sepsis**, which is a dangerous reaction to an infection. If your baby is less than two months old and you are concerned about a possible urinary tract infection, **seek medical help right away**.

There are several different types of antibiotics used for urinary tract infections in children, and they come in different forms.

- Very young babies (less than two months old) and very ill children will be treated in the hospital with antibiotics put directly into a vein through an intravenous infusion (also known as an IV).
- Older babies and young children can swallow liquid antibiotics.
- Older children can take pills.

Antibiotics can cause side effects, but these are usually mild. For example, your child might get an upset stomach or diarrhea. Some children get a rash, which could suggest an allergic reaction.

Be sure to talk to your doctor if your child gets a rash or any other side effects.

What will happen to my child?

Your child should start to feel better after a day or two of taking antibiotics. But it's important to make sure your child takes the antibiotics for as long as the doctor recommends. Otherwise, there is a chance that your child will become sick again.

It's possible for a urinary tract infection to damage a child's kidneys. But this is less likely if a child is treated early on with antibiotics. Sometimes doctors recommend children have a scan of their kidneys to check for any damage after a urinary tract infection.

Some children get repeated urinary tract infections. This is often related to other problems, such as holding in urine for too long or having a problem with their urinary tract.

If your child gets repeated infections, your doctor will explore possible causes and discuss treatment options with you. Together, you can decide on the best approach for your child.

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