

UTIs in Children: What to Expect

What is a UTI?

A urinary tract infection, or UTI, is an infection of the urinary tract, which includes the kidneys, bladder, and urethra (the tube that carries urine out of your body). UTIs are more common in girls than in boys. They are usually caused by germs that live in the intestines.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms depend on your child's age. Older children may have pain with urination or feel like they need to urinate often. Younger children may have a fever, vomiting, strong-smelling urine, or blood in the urine. If your child has any of these symptoms, you should take him or her to the doctor.

How will the doctor know if my child has it?

Your doctor will take a urine sample from your child. Urine is usually collected by cleaning the area where the urine comes out, then having your child urinate into a container. In young children who do not have control of their bladder, it is sometimes necessary to collect urine through a catheter (a thin rubber tube placed in the urethra).

Your doctor can test the urine sample for germs and other signs of an infection. The tests can also help your doctor choose the best treatment if an infection is found.

How is it treated and prevented?

UTIs are usually treated with an antibiotic pill. If your child has a bad infection, he or she may need antibiotics through an IV.

Although cranberry juice has been shown to reduce UTIs in adult women, there have not been any studies in children. If your child is uncircumcised, teach him to clean the foreskin on his penis regularly. It is important for girls to wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom to keep germs from entering the urethra.

What are the risks?

UTIs sometimes lead to kidney infections and scarring, but this is rare. Special tests, like an x-ray and ultrasound, can detect these problems. Your doctor will talk to you about these tests if they are needed.

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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