

UTIs in Children: What to Expect

What is a UTI?

A urinary tract infection (or UTI for short) affects the kidneys, bladder, or urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the body). UTIs are more common in girls and uncircumcised boys. They usually happen when germs that live in the intestines get into the urethra.

What are the symptoms?

Your child may:

- Have a burning feeling with urination
- Need to urinate more often
- Feel like he or she needs to urinate, but can't
- Wet his or her pants when already potty trained
- Have pain in the stomach area or low back

Younger children may not be able to tell you they have these symptoms. Warning signs in younger children are fever, vomiting, fussiness, poor feeding, strong-smelling urine, or blood in the urine. Take your child to the doctor right away if you notice these symptoms.

How will the doctor know if my child has a UTI?

The doctor will take a urine sample from your child. To do this, you'll need to clean the area where the urine comes out, then have your child urinate into a container. If your child is too young to control his or her bladder yet, the doctor may need to put a thin tube called a catheter into the urethra to collect urine.

The urine will be tested for germs and other signs of an infection. These tests help the doctor choose the best treatment for your child.

How are UTIs treated?

UTIs are usually treated with antibiotic medicines. If your child has a bad infection, he or she may need to stay in the hospital to get antibiotics through an IV tube.

How can I keep my child from getting a UTI?

You might have heard that cranberry juice or probiotics can help clear up UTIs. But neither of these have been proven to work in children. If your son is not circumcised, teach him to clean the foreskin on his penis. Girls should always wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom to keep germs from getting into the urethra. Avoiding and treating constipation can also prevent UTIs.

What are the risks of UTIs?

UTIs can lead to kidney infections and scarring if they are not treated in time. Your child's doctor might need to do x-rays or an ultrasound to rule out these problems.

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