

Consult your doctor to ensure that this information is right for your child. Information below is for general information and does not constitute medical advice.

What is a urinary tract infection (UTI)?

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is a bacterial infection of the bladder, kidneys, ureters, or urethra, the organs and tubes that make up the [urinary tract](#) . Most [UTIs](#) are bladder infections ([cystitis](#)) or kidney infections ([pyelonephritis](#)).

Are UTIs in children serious?

UTIs in children usually clear up quickly if they receive early treatment. The biggest concern about untreated UTIs in children is that they can cause permanent kidney damage and scarring. Repeated scarring can lead to [high blood pressure](#) and reduced kidney function, including kidney failure. Infants and young children seem to be at special risk for this complication.

In addition to permanent kidney damage, serious short-term complications of UTIs such as [acute kidney failure](#) and widespread infection ([sepsis](#)) can and do occur. These complications are more likely in premature infants and newborns and in infants with urinary tract obstructions.

What causes UTIs in children?

UTIs in children are usually caused by bacteria on the skin near the urethra that enter the [urethra](#) and travel up the urinary tract. Bacteria that normally live in the [large intestine](#) and are present in stool (feces) are the most common cause of infection. Occasionally UTIs are caused by bacteria traveling through the blood or [lymphatic system](#) to the urinary tract.

How do I know if my child has a UTI?

UTIs in children may not cause obvious urinary symptoms. Symptoms of a UTI in an infant or young child may include:

- . An unexplained fever.
- 0. Urine that has an unusual smell.
- 0. A lack of appetite.
- 0. Vomiting.
- 0. Irritability.

It may be hard to tell whether a baby or young child has a UTI because his or her symptoms may be different and more subtle than those of an older child or adult with a UTI. Also, infants and young children can't tell you how they're feeling.

Older children with UTIs are more likely to have urinary symptoms, such as:

- 0. Pain or burning during urination.

- 0. A frequent urge to urinate.
- 0. Loss of bladder control.
- 0. Red, pink, cloudy, or foul-smelling urine.
- 0. Pain in the back on one side ([flank pain](#)) or lower abdominal pain.

How are UTIs diagnosed?

Diagnosis of a UTI in a child typically requires a medical history and physical exam, [urinalysis](#), and urine culture. However, many doctors will prescribe [antibiotics](#) for a UTI without waiting for the results of a urine culture if a child's symptoms and urinalysis results strongly suggest the presence of a UTI.

Your child's doctor may order additional tests after the infection improves to determine whether your child has a structural or functional problem with the urinary tract that may make him or her more likely to get UTIs. The most common of these problems is the backward flow of urine from the bladder into the kidneys ([vesicoureteral reflux](#)).

What is the treatment for UTIs in children?

Treatment for most children with UTIs is oral antibiotics and home care. Antibiotic treatment typically lasts 7 to 14 days but may vary depending on the severity and location of the infection (bladder or kidneys), your child's age and medical history, and other factors. Home treatment includes:

- . Having your child drink extra fluids to flush bacteria out of the bladder.
- 0. Reminding your child to urinate often and to empty the bladder each time.
- 0. Having your child take warm baths (without bubble bath or shampoo in the water).

[Intravenous \(IV\)](#) antibiotics and brief hospitalization may be necessary if your child is younger than 3 months of age, is too nauseated or sick to take oral medications, or has an [impaired immune system](#).