



A health series to educate families on well-being issues with their children

A collaborative effort of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center



UPMC

What is a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

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- The urinary tract is made up of the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra
- A Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) is caused by bacteria infecting any part of the urinary tract. This includes the lower or upper part of the urinary tract. The bacteria usually comes from the skin around the genitals and anus.
- An infection of the lower urinary tract is called a “bladder infection” or cystitis
- An infection of the upper urinary tract is called a “kidney infection” or pyelonephritis

What Children Are at Risk of Getting a UTI?

- Girls are more at risk than boys
- A child who has an abnormality in the structure of his or her urinary tract is at risk of getting an infection
- A condition called “reflux” puts a child at risk of developing a UTI. Vesicoureteral Reflux (VUR) describes a problem with the urinary tract. This is not the type of “reflux” that causes children to spit up or vomit.
- Vesicoureteral Reflux (VUR) is a condition in which urine flows the wrong way; the urine goes backwards from the bladder up to the ureters and kidneys
- Poor hygiene and wiping habits put a child at risk for a UTI
- Using products that are irritating to the genital area, such as bubble baths, puts a child at risk for a UTI





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What Are the Symptoms of a UTI?

- In very young children, sometimes the only sign of a UTI is a fever
- Other very young children with a UTI might be fussy and might feed poorly or vomit
- In older children, signs and symptoms of a UTI can include:
 - Burning sensation while peeing
 - Needing to pee often
 - Fever
 - Having accidents (peeing the bed or peeing in the underwear)
 - Belly pain
 - Back pain
 - Tiredness
 - Vomiting

How Is a UTI Diagnosed?

- A doctor diagnoses a UTI by examining a child, taking a history of symptoms, and checking a urine test
- The urine will be sent for a urinalysis. This is a quick test that gives a general idea of whether a child has a UTI.
- The urine is usually then sent for a urine culture. This a specific test that checks for an infection and can determine which specific bacteria caused the infection.

How Is a UTI Treated?

- If a child has a UTI, a doctor will prescribe an antibiotic. The exact antibiotic will depend on which bacteria caused the infection.
- If a child has an uncomplicated lower tract UTI (bladder infection), the child can generally be treated at home
- If a child is very sick or has a more complicated UTI, the child might have to be in the hospital
- It is very important to finish all of the antibiotic, even if the child is feeling better. That way, all of the bacteria will be killed.





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How Are UTIs Prevented?

- It is best to change infants' and toddlers' diapers often
- Little girls should be taught to wipe from front to back
- Kids should be taught to pee when they need to go and not to hold it
- Cotton underwear is best
- Girls should avoid bubble baths and strong soaps; these can cause irritation and put a child at risk for a UTI

Can UTIs Cause Long-Term Problems?

- Undiagnosed and untreated UTIs can cause kidney damage
- UTIs that aren't fully treated can cause kidney damage. Again, it is very important to finish the whole course of antibiotics.
- If a child has a lot of UTIs or there is a suspicion that the child might have an abnormality of the urinary tract, the child might have to special tests to check for an anatomical abnormality or reflux. Children will usually have an ultrasound, and will sometimes have a test called a VCUG. Both tests check a child for a problem with the way the urinary tract is made.

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