

Be Cool About Your Baby's Fever

- By Sally Squires

Parents get too hot about their kid's fevers, say researchers at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions in a newly published study. When a fever strikes a child, first parents overmedicate, use cold baths unnecessarily and check temperatures too frequently.

A fever is an important way the body fights infection and "is actually a good thing", says Michael Crocetti, director of pediatrics at John Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore and lead author of the study, which appears in the journal *Pediatrics*. Viruses and bacteria grow best in cooler temperatures, so by raising body temperature a few degrees with a fever, the immune system makes the body less hospitable to infection.

But parents usually don't see the benefit of fever. Like a similar study done 20 years ago, this report shows that 75 percent of parents worry when a child runs a fever, with more than half reporting feeling "very worried". Parents mistakenly fear that childhood fevers can cause brain damage and death, the study found. More than half of the 340 parents surveyed said they check a feverish child's temperature more than once an hour, rather than every four to six hours as recommended by many doctors. And yet many did not know that a normal temperature is around 98.6 degrees. Nearly 75 percent of parents said they sometimes used sponge baths in an effort to lower the child's body temperature. Two-third of these parents apply alcohol, cool water or a cool rag during these baths. Not only is that kind of sponging ineffective, the authors note, but alcohol can cause dehydration, particularly in young children, and should not be used. Cool baths can also produce shivering and cause discomfort.

The biggest mistake parents make is in overdosing children with acetaminophen (Tylenol and similar products) or ibuprofen (Advil and Motrin, for example). Tylenol is approved for use every four hours, with up to five doses in 24 hours. But 14 percent of parents said they gave Tylenol every three hours or less when their child had a fever. Likewise, ibuprofen should be used only every six hours (and is not approved for infants aged 6 months or younger). But nearly half of parents said they give ibuprofen to their kids at five hours or less.

Source: Times of India, Friday, June 29, 2001, Page 11, Health & Science