



Urinary tract infection (UTI)

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection anywhere in the urinary tract. The urinary tract includes the kidneys, bladder and urethra (the tube from which urine passes out of the bladder).

UTIs are common in children of all ages, but are especially common in children who are still in nappies.

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Signs and symptoms of UTI

If your child has a UTI, they may:

- have pain or burning when passing urine (doing a wee)
- have pain in the lower part of the abdomen (under the belly button)
- need to go to the toilet frequently to urinate
- pass some urine before getting to the toilet (wetting or incontinence)
- have smelly or discoloured urine
- have a fever or vomiting.

Young children with a UTI may not show any of these symptoms, but they are just generally unwell.

What causes a UTI?

A UTI is usually caused by bacteria (germs) getting into the bladder or urethra. The germs most often come from the bowels (gut), or from faeces (poo) that is on the skin and then gets into the urethra.

When to see a doctor

Testing your child's urine is the only way to know for sure if they have a UTI. UTIs should not go untreated, as the infection can cause further problems with the kidneys. You should take your child to a doctor if they:

- develop any of the signs and symptoms of UTI
- are unwell with a fever without other obvious causes.

The doctor may want to do a urine test. See our fact sheet [Urine samples](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Urine_samples/) (https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Urine_samples/) for information on how to collect a urine sample.

A urine sample is usually tested first with a dipstick testing strip, which can help show if there is any sign of infection. If the dipstick test shows that there might be a UTI, then treatment may be started. The final urine test results can take up to 48 hours to be sent back to your doctor.

Treatment for a UTI

The main way of treating a UTI is with antibiotics, which can usually be taken by mouth as a tablet or syrup. Children who are very unwell may be admitted to hospital for antibiotics given directly into a vein through a drip (intravenous or IV therapy).

Some children with a UTI may need an ultrasound to look for a problem with the bladder or kidneys. Your doctor will discuss this with you if required.

Care at home

If your child has been diagnosed with a UTI, you can care for them while they are recovering by:

- following the doctor's instructions for giving the antibiotics – it is very important to complete the whole course of antibiotics, even if your child seems better
- keeping them at home and allowing them to get extra rest
- giving them plenty of fluids to drink.

Most children who are treated for a UTI make a full recovery and have no future problems.

Key points to remember

- UTIs are a common infection, especially in children who wear nappies.
- A doctor needs to do a urine test to diagnose a UTI.
- The main treatment for UTIs is antibiotics.

For more information

- Kids Health Info fact sheet: [Urine samples \(https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Urine_samples/\)](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Urine_samples/)

Common questions our doctors are asked

How can I prevent my child getting a UTI?

Good hygiene can help prevent the spread of bacteria from the gut. When girls are wiping their bottom after a poo, they should always wipe front to back (vagina to bottom). Also, being constipated can increase the chance of a child getting a UTI. See your doctor if you think your child is constipated.

Can I give my child cranberry juice to treat a UTI?

Children with UTIs need to be treated by a doctor who will prescribe antibiotics. Cranberry juice is not recommended as a treatment option for children.

Developed by The Royal Children's Hospital General Medicine department. We acknowledge the input of RCH consumers and carers.

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