

## What parents should know:

# Urinary tract infections in young children with spina bifida

Children with spina bifida are more likely than children without spina bifida to have urinary tract infections (UTIs). UTIs can be harmful to children with spina bifida and may lead to kidney damage. However, sometimes symptoms that look like a UTI are not actually a UTI. This sheet will help you recognize the symptoms of a UTI and what you should do if you think your child has one.

UTIs happen when bacteria (germs) get into the urinary tract. The urinary tract is the series of organs and tubes where urine (pee) is produced, collected, and eliminated from the body. This includes the kidneys and bladder. Your doctor may use the term “pyelonephritis” (sounds like pie-low-nef-fry-tis) to refer to an infection in the kidneys.

## Symptoms of a UTI

**For infants less than one year old, one or more of the following:**

- A temperature above 101.3°F or below 95°F
- Seizures with a fever
- Generally not doing well (failure to thrive)
- Unusually tight muscles or stronger reflexes than usual (spasticity)
- Fussiness

**For children older than one year, one or more of the following:**

- Fever above 100.4°F
- Pink or red urine (not just a single spot of blood)
- Pain in back or lower stomach
- Wet when not normally wet between catheterizations
- An urge to urinate more
- Pain or burning when urinating or catheterizing
- Cloudy-looking or foul-smelling urine

## What if I think my child has a UTI?

If you think your child has a UTI, call your spina bifida clinic. Clinic staff may ask you to bring your child in for two urine tests. **Both are needed.** If you are at your child’s primary care doctor, a walk-in clinic, the emergency room, or some other location, call your spina bifida clinic and let them know where you are taking your child for the tests. They can help you ask for the correct tests. Clinic staff will also need to contact that doctor to get a copy of your child’s test results.



## What if my child does not have symptoms and I'm told that he or she has a UTI?

Many children with spina bifida, especially those who use a catheter to empty their bladder, have bacteria in the urinary tract that may not cause symptoms. This is normal and should not be alarming. If your child **does not** have symptoms and you've been told he or she has a UTI, call your spina bifida clinic before giving your child any medication for the UTI. The staff at your spina bifida clinic can look at the results from both urine tests described below, and talk to you about the best treatment plan for your child.

### Urine tests

When a UTI is suspected, your child will need two urine tests. The two urine tests are a "UA" or "urinalysis" (sounds like your-in-al-iss-sis), and a urine culture. Both tests are needed and can be done from the same urine sample. A urinalysis is done to find signs of a UTI. A urine culture identifies the bacteria that may be causing the UTI.

### Tips for urine tests

1. A urine sample should always be obtained using a catheter, unless your child is toilet-trained. A catheter is a special tube used to drain urine from the body. Do not use urine samples collected using a bag that is placed on your child.
2. If your child is toilet-trained, then a "clean catch" urine sample can be used. Clean catch is a simple way to prevent bacteria from getting into a urine sample. A nurse can show you how to do this.
3. The urine sample should **always** be sent for **both** a urinalysis and a urine culture.
4. When you are able to reach your spina bifida clinic, tell them that your child was diagnosed with a UTI so they can get the results of the urine tests.

### How is a UTI treated?

The decision to treat a UTI should be made by someone who is familiar with spina bifida **and** with your child's medical history. It is important to treat only true infections, otherwise the bacteria get used to common antibiotics and the medication no longer works to fight off the infection.

1. A UTI is usually treated with a medication called an antibiotic. Antibiotics treat infections caused by bacteria.
2. If the tests indicate a UTI, and your child's doctor thinks your child has a UTI, the doctor will prescribe an antibiotic.
3. Your child should take all the antibiotic medication that is prescribed. **Do not stop the medication early, even if your child feels better.**

Clinic Contact \_\_\_\_\_

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