

Back to school comes with its own set of challenges – from getting back on that early morning schedule to the start of homework struggles. But one other issue that comes with the start of the school year is the start of back-to-school illnesses.

One of the main symptoms of illness can be a fever. A fever is a body temperature that registers at 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or above.

According to Dr. Patrick Masching, an OSF HealthCare Emergency Physician, a fever by itself is not a reason to seek a physician's care. He recommends treating a fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen as recommended, accompanied with fluids and rest.

But for many parents, a high fever brings high anxiety. Dr. Masching recommends keeping a close eye on your child, and paying attention to his or her behavior, rather than the number on the thermometer.

"Actually there is not a magic number," he says. "It's a very common misperception that if a child has a fever of 105, they're going to have brain damage. Actually it would be a matter of what's causing the infection.

"Most fevers are going to be because of a virus, and it's a combination of several things. One would be the fever itself, but most importantly, what does the child look like? You can have a child with a 105 degree fever, and be active and playful, and you're amazed they even have a fever. But you can also have a child who only has a 101 degree fever that's lethargic, not active and that's someone who would absolutely need to be seen immediately, despite having a lower temperature."

Sometimes finding the right care for your child's condition can be confusing, but before you hightail it to the emergency room, a few tips, can help you make the best choice about where to get the medical attention you need.

Calling your child's primary care physician is the best place to start. But if you don't have a physician or if you are unable to get ahold of him or her, evaluating your child's condition is the next step.

If the illness isn't life threatening, but needs to be taken care of right away, urgent care like [OSF PromptCare](#) or online help through [OSF OnCall](#) are available. Both options are equipped to treat minor, but urgent health conditions like flu symptoms and ear infections.

The Emergency Department is the best place for treating severe and life-threatening conditions, but is also the most expensive form of care.

But emergencies do happen. Dr. Masching says you shouldn't discount warning signs like labored breathing. Emergency physicians are equipped to find the problem with life threatening illnesses, fast.

"If your child at any time has confusion, difficulty breathing, and you feel that this could potentially be an immediate life-threatening event, they would need to go to an emergency room," says Dr. Masching. "At the emergency department they can run tests to determine what would be causing the illness, check to see if the child does have pneumonia, a urinary tract infection, or other factors that might be causing the fever, and treat appropriately."

And of course, simple prevention is the first step in staying healthy. Getting a flu vaccine and practicing good hand hygiene are the best defenses against cold and flu viruses that head back to school with your kids.