Febrile Seizure

What is a febrile seizure?
A febrile seizure is a “fit” or “convulsion” that occurs with a fever. In almost every case, the cause of the fever is a simple viral infection such as a cold, flu or stomach virus. When a child has a febrile seizure, the entire body shakes and the eyes appear to roll to the back of the head. They are very common and occur in five to 10 percent of all normal children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years. They usually occur at the beginning of an illness before parents are even aware that their child has a fever. Most febrile seizures last 15 minutes or less. Most children who have febrile seizures outgrow them by four or five years of age. Although febrile seizures are frightening for parents to watch, they do not cause brain damage. Approximately 30 percent of children with febrile seizures have a second seizure with the same illness.

How are febrile seizures treated?
Most febrile seizures do not require treatment since they quickly stop by themselves. Seizure medicines are generally not used for febrile seizures since they often do more harm than good for this type of seizure. Treatment in the emergency department is primarily focused on a very thorough physical examination to rule out dangerous infections such as meningitis or problems with the brain. In most cases, blood tests and X-rays are not done since they add no useful information. If the examination is normal, most children with febrile seizures are able to return home.

What to do if your child has another seizure
Your child may have another febrile seizure with this illness or a future illness. If your child has a seizure we recommend the following:

- Stay calm!
- Do not put anything in your child’s mouth. Place your child on his or her side to help drain saliva from the mouth
- Loosen clothing
- Don’t try to hold your child still. Move objects away from your child so he or she does not get hurt
- Support your child’s head with a pillow or soft object.
- Do not try to give your child any medicine during a seizure. It may cause him or her to choke.

What to watch for
See your doctor or return to the emergency department for the following:

- Further seizures. All children who have had a seizure with fever should be examined by a physician.
- Fever that lasts more than four to five days.
- Inability to wake your child.
- Fever with a stiff neck and headache.
- Fever with purple rash on the skin.