

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Forearm Fracture

What is a forearm fracture?

A fracture is a break in a bone. There are two bones in your child's forearm:

- the radius (on the thumb side of their arm)
- the ulna (on the little-finger side of their arm).

A child's bones are different than adults in some important ways. First, the bones of a child are more flexible. Sometimes the bones crack like green branches from a live tree instead of snapping like a dry stick. Other times the bones just buckle slightly. When this happens, the bone is broken but there isn't a clear fracture line just a slightly raised area on the outside of the bone. The second major difference is that a child's bones are still growing. Bones grow from an area near their ends called the growth plate. Sometimes fractures occur within the growth plate and can be difficult to see on an x-ray. Fractures in this area can effect the growth of the bone and may require special x-rays or other tests.

How does it occur?

A forearm fracture usually occurs from:

- a fall onto an outstretched arm or hand
- a direct blow to the arm.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are pain, swelling, and tenderness at the site of injury. Your child may not be able to move the arm normally.

How is it diagnosed?

Your child's health care provider will examine the forearm and look for tenderness. An x-ray of the arm will show the fracture.

How is it treated?

- If the broken bone is crooked, your child's health care provider will straighten it. Your child is given medicine first so the straightening is not too painful. Some fractures that cannot be straightened or that are broken into many pieces may need to have surgery.
- Your child may be given a splint to wear for a few days until the swelling begins to go down. Then the arm will be put in a cast for 4 to 8 weeks.
- Your child's health care provider may prescribe anti-inflammatory medicines or other pain medicines.
- Your child should elevate the arm on a pillow or the back of a chair as often as possible for the first 2 to 3 days. This will help control pain and swelling.
- Your child may place ice packs over the cast for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days. Take care not to get your cast wet if it is a plaster cast.

When should I call Idaho Falls Pediatrics?

Call your child's health care provider if:

- The pain is getting worse instead of better.

You feel that your child's cast is too tight and they have swelling that doesn't get better after the arm is elevated.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.