

Advice for carers of children with a fever

A high temperature (fever) is one sign that your child is unwell. It is a good idea to keep a thermometer at home so you can check your child's temperature and give this information to the GP or hospital if you need to speak to them. A normal temperature is about 37 centigrade (37°C). How high a temperature is does not necessarily predict how serious an illness is, although in younger children it can be more important.

In the following situations, you should seek medical assistance as soon as possible:

- children younger than 3 months of age with a temperature of 38°C or higher
- children aged 3-6 months with a temperature of 39°C or higher

If your child has a fever and one of the symptoms in the list below, then you should seek medical attention immediately:

- Rash which does not disappear when a glass tumbler is pressed on the skin (a non-blanching rash)
- Very stiff neck
- Cannot stand being in the light
- Very lethargic, drowsy or floppy
- Seizure or fit
- Severe headache
- Muscle pains

You can help to reduce your child's temperature to make them feel more comfortable by doing the following things:

1. Do not wrap them up

Children lose a lot of heat through the skin, so it is good idea to dress a child with a fever in fewer clothes than normal. The child should not be left naked, but a single layer of cotton clothing is usually enough indoors.

2. Fluids

Children with a fever can get dehydrated easily. Signs of this include:

- Sunken eyes
- No tears when crying
- Dry mouth
- Passing less urine than normal
- In small children, the fontanelle ('soft spot') may become sunken as well

Give them plenty of fluid to drink to prevent this. It will also help to bring the temperature down and make your child feel better. You should encourage small amounts of fluid frequently even if they are vomiting. A breast-fed baby may need more frequent feeds.

3. Fan

An electric fan can help cool your child. Do not point it straight at them as this may cool the skin too much. If the child has goose bumps, the cold air is preventing the blood getting to the surface of the skin and they will not lose heat so well.

4. Medication

If your child has a fever but is not distressed or particularly unwell then medication may not be necessary. Antipyretic (fever-lowering) medication does not treat the cause of the fever and does not prevent febrile convulsions (seizures associated with fever), although it may make your child more comfortable.

If you feel your child does need medication to lower the temperature, then you should use either paracetamol or ibuprofen. If the medicine you have chosen does not work after a few doses, then try the other. If your child becomes distressed by their fever before the next dose is due, you could try the other medicine.

Paracetamol can be given regularly every 4 hours according to the label on the bottle. It is very important not to give more paracetamol than recommended as it can harm the liver.

For children over 3 months of age, ibuprofen can be used. Keep to the dose recommended on the bottle. Give up to 3 times a day.

Other advice

Remember medicines are dangerous and must be stored out of the reach of children.

Sponging with cool or tepid water is no longer recommended.

Keep your child away from nursery or school while the child's fever persists but notify the school or nursery of the illness. In some cases, you may be given specific advice about illnesses that need longer periods away from school, or time away from pregnant women.

You should seek further advice if:

- The child has a fit, develops a non-blanching rash, or has one of the other problems in the box at the start of this advice leaflet.
- You feel that the child is becoming more unwell.
- You are more worried than when you previously sought advice.
- The fever lasts longer than 5 days.
- You are concerned that you are unable to look after your child.

For further advice please contact:

- Your GP
- NHS 111 111, or 111.nhs.uk
- Emergency Department 01535 294481
- The NHS website www.nhs.uk

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This advice is consistent with NICE clinical guideline CG160 – **Fever in under 5s: assessment and initial management** (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg160>)

Notes:

Are you a victim of Domestic Violence? For confidential advice, contact:

Bradford	0808 2800 999	https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact
North Yorkshire	03000 110 110	https://www.idas.org.uk/
Lancashire	0300 323 0085	https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/

If you require this leaflet in other languages or formats please telephone the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01535 294019

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