

Fever in Children under five

This leaflet offers more information about the management of fever in a child under five. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.

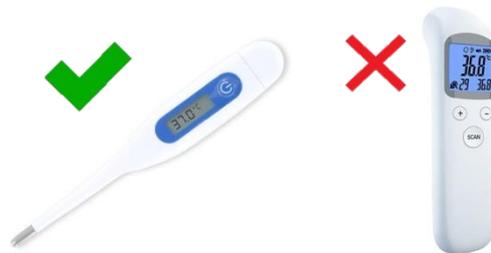
What is a fever?

A fever is a high temperature. Most fevers in children are not serious and are due to the common infections of childhood such as coughs, colds and other viral infections. However, sometimes a fever is a symptom of a serious infection. As a general rule, in children a temperature of over 37.5C (99.5F) is a fever.

As a parent it can be extremely worrying if your child has a high temperature. However, it's very common and often clears up by itself without treatment.

A quick and easy way to find out whether your child has a fever is to take their temperature using a thermometer. If your child's face feels hot to the touch and they look red or flushed check their temperature with a thermometer.

Safe, cheap digital thermometers are available from your pharmacist and online. It is advisable to purchase one if you have a child under 5. Digital thermometers vary in quality. It is better to buy a cheap one that measures temperature in the armpit than a non-contact forehead thermometer.



What causes a fever?

Most fevers are caused by infections or other illnesses. The high body temperature (fever) makes it more difficult for the bacteria and viruses that cause infections to survive.

Common conditions that can cause fevers include:

- upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs)
- influenza
- ear infections
- roseola – a virus that causes a temperature and a rash
- tonsillitis
- kidney or urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- common childhood illnesses, such as chickenpox and whooping cough
- serious bacterial infections such as sepsis.

Your child's temperature can also be raised after vaccinations or if they overheat because of too much bedding or clothing.

How should you care for a child with fever at home?

There are several things you can do to help bring your child's temperature down and make them more comfortable:

1. Keep the room cool, 18°C (64.4°F) is about right and make sure fresh air is circulating.
2. Do not undress your child or sponge them down to cool them – fever is a natural and healthy response to infection. If your child is shivering or sweating a lot, change the amount of clothes they are wearing.
3. Make sure your child has plenty of cool water to drink to prevent dehydration even if they are not thirsty. Give them food if they want it.
4. Give them paracetamol if they are distressed or unwell (but see conditions below).
5. Check on your child regularly during the night.
6. Keep them at home (if they do not have any of the features mentioned below).

Do not:

1. Do not cover them up in too many clothes or bedclothes.
2. Do not give aspirin to under-16s.
3. Do not combine ibuprofen and paracetamol, unless a GP tells you to do so.
4. Do not give paracetamol to a child under two months unless a GP tells you to do so.
5. Do not give ibuprofen to a child under three months or under 5kg unless a GP tells you to do so.
6. Do not give ibuprofen to children with asthma unless a GP tells you to do so.

If your child seems to be otherwise well – for example, if they're playing and attentive – it's less likely they're seriously ill.

When should you seek urgent medical advice?

Contact your GP or health visitor urgently if your child:

- is **under three months old** and has a temperature of 38C (101F) or above
- is **between three and six months old** and has a temperature of 39C (102F) or above
- has a rash that does not disappear with pressure (see below).

Children who fit into one of the categories above must be assessed by a health care professional **face-to-face**. If other members of the household have symptoms of Covid-19 or are confirmed to have Covid-19, please inform your healthcare professional so that appropriate precautions can be taken to protect you, your child and others.

The picture below offers some advice on how urgently you should seek medical attention if your child shows other signs of being unwell.



You need urgent help

Go to the nearest Hospital Emergency (A&E) Department or phone 999 if your child:

- Becomes pale, mottled and feels abnormally cold to touch
- Is going blue around the lips
- Has a fit / seizure or a stiff neck
- Is bothered by light
- Finds it hard to breathe and sucks in their stomach in under their ribs
- The soft spot on their head bulges outwards
- Becomes extremely agitated (crying inconsolably despite distraction), confused or very lethargic (difficult to wake)
- Develops a rash that does not disappear with pressure



You need to contact a doctor or nurse today

Please ring your GP surgery or call NHS 111 - dial 111- if your child:

- Is finding it hard to breathe
- Seems dehydrated (dry mouth, sunken eyes, no tears, drowsy or passing less urine than usual)
- Is becoming drowsy (excessively sleepy) or irritable (unable to settle them with toys, TV, food or picking up) – especially if they remain drowsy or irritable despite their fever coming down
- Has extreme shivering or complains of muscle pain
- Continues to have a fever above 38.0°C for more than 5 days
- Seems to be getting worse or if you are worried



Self care

If none of the above are present, you can provide the care your child needs at home

Rashes and the tumbler test

If your child has a rash do the 'tumbler test' (also called the glass test). Press a glass tumbler firmly against the rash. If you can see the spots through the glass and they do not fade this is called a 'non-blanching rash'. **If this rash is present seek medical advice immediately.** Rashes are harder to see on dark skin so look for rashes on paler areas, such as palms of the hands, soles of the feet, tummy and inside the eyelids. (Photo courtesy of the Meningitis Research Foundation)



Useful sources of information

Further information can be obtained from:



The NHS website

(<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children/>)



The NHS Scotland Self-help guide (<https://www.nhsinform.scot/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-fever-in-babies>)

Contact us

For further information, please speak to your General Practitioner, community midwife or health visitor.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer). **Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

