

Fever in Children

This leaflet provides information about fevers in children. 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 and why has my child got it?

A fever is a rise in body temperature above a normal level. This is defined as a temperature above 38 degrees Celsius.

We know it can be worrying when your child has a high temperature but it is very common and in most children the fever will settle down without treatment. Most fevers are due to an infection or other illness causing inflammation. A fever helps the body to fight infection by stimulating the immune system (our body's natural defence system against infection).

What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of a fever vary between children. You may notice your child

- Feels hot to touch (especially forehead, stomach and back)
- Has cooler hands and feet than normal
- Has red cheeks
- Is less active than normal
- Feels sweaty or clammy
- Is shivering or complaining of feeling cold.

How to test for fever

There are lots of different types of thermometers available. We recommend using a digital thermometer which you can buy from most supermarkets and pharmacies. The thermometer will come with instructions which should be followed to give an accurate reading.

What treatments are available?

It is not always necessary to give medicines to children with a fever. If your child is upset and uncomfortable with a temperature, you can give them paracetamol (Calpol) to help bring their temperature back to normal. If this doesn't lower their temperature within a couple of hours, you can also try ibuprofen (Nurofen). Follow the instructions on the bottle / pack for how much and how often you can give your child these medicines. It may be useful to keep a diary of when you are giving them to avoid accidentally giving too much.

These medicines **will not** stop the fever coming back later in the day but they will help your child to feel more comfortable while their body fights the cause of fever. If your child is comfortable then you do not need to give these medicines even if they have a fever. Avoid giving aspirin to any child under 16 years old.

In some cases, the doctor may decide it is appropriate to treat the infection causing the temperature with antibiotics. If this is the case, please follow the instructions given by the doctor. However, most childhood illnesses and infections **do not** need antibiotics to treat them.

What can I do to help my child?

- **DO encourage them to drink.** A high temperature means we lose more fluid from our bodies than usual. Encouraging your child to drink plenty of fluids will help prevent them becoming dehydrated. Ice lollies are a really good way of giving your child fluid if they are reluctant to drink.
- **DO check on your child** and monitor their temperature regularly, including during the night.
- **DO keep your child in a well-ventilated room and avoid overheating the room.**
- **DO NOT sponge your child with cool water;** this will not help the fever come down.
- **DO NOT wrap them in lots of layers of blankets.** Children with a fever do not need to be under or overdressed. If your child is shivering, this is because of the fever and is the body's way of trying to cool down.
- **DO** keep them away from school until they are fully recovered.

What should I look out for?

Watch for signs of dehydration including:

- Dry mouth / dry tongue / dry lips
- Eyes that look sunken
- Fewer tears / no tears when crying
- Drier nappies (needing to be changed less than half of their normal rate)
- Being irritable, tired or weak.

If you find signs of dehydration encourage your child to drink more fluids and seek further advice if you are worried. **If your child has a rash**, you can check it with the **'tumbler test'**. To do this, press a clear glass over the rash. If the spots do not disappear under the pressure of the glass, you must seek urgent medical advice. It is harder to see the spots on darker skin, therefore in children with darker skin, try using paler areas such as palms and soles of the feet.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Call 999 or return to the Children's Emergency Department Immediately if your child:

- Becomes unresponsive
- Becomes blue
- Is finding it hard to breath
- Has a fit or starts to twitch and shake
- Develops a rash which does not go away with the tumbler test
- Develops neck stiffness or becomes distressed by bright lights
- Is 0-3 months old and their temperature is greater than 38 degrees C

Contact your GP, or return to the Children's Emergency Department today if:

- Your child is becoming more unwell since being medically reviewed
- Is vomiting, not able keep fluids down and develops signs of dehydration
- Temperature does not come down despite giving paracetamol or ibuprofen
- Is complaining of a headache that doesn't get better after paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- Has had a fever for more than five days in a row.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Emergency Department on 020 8725 2666 and ask to be put through to the Paediatric Emergency Department.

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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

