



Fevers (high temperatures) in Children

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

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What is a fever?

A fever is very common in young children. More than 60% of parents say their child aged 6 months – 5 years has had one (NHS 2016). It is nature's way of helping the body fight infection.

A normal temperature is between 36.4c and 37.5c. This is dependent on the time of day, environment and can vary from child to child.

A fever is considered a temperature 38C (100.4F) or above.

It is usually caused by a minor viral infection, such as a cough or cold, and this can normally be treated at home. Children can also get fevers after vaccinations.

A high temperature can cause concern and worry for parents and carers, however most children recover with no problems after 3-5 days.

How to tell if your child has a fever

Your child may have a fever if:

- They feel hot to touch on their forehead, back or stomach.
- They look flushed
- They feel sweaty and clammy
- Have cold mottled peripheries
- Rapid breathing
- Goose pimples and shivering

If you suspect your child has a fever, you should check their temperature with a thermometer.

Ideally you should use a digital thermometer as these are safe and cheap and are available from your local pharmacy, supermarket or online retailers.

Forehead thermometers shouldn't be used as they are inaccurate as they measure the heat of the skin and not the body temperature.

How to take your child's temperature



(nhs 2016)

- hold your child comfortably and put the thermometer in their armpit – always use the thermometer in the armpit with children under five
- gently but firmly, hold their arm against their body to keep the thermometer in place for however long it says in the manufacturer's instructions – usually about 15 seconds; some digital thermometers beep when they're ready
- the display on the thermometer will then show your child's temperature

Other types of thermometers:

Ear (tympanic) thermometers – these allow you to take a temperature from the ear. They are usually quicker but can be more expensive. If they aren't put in the ear correctly they

can give misleading readings. This is why they're not recommended in babies and infants as their ear holes are small.

You should **never** use an old-fashioned glass thermometer that contains mercury. These can break, releasing small splinters of glass and highly poisonous mercury. They're no longer used in hospitals and you can't buy them in shops.

How to care for your feverish child

Temperature control is aimed mainly at increasing the child's comfort.

- Paracetamol and Ibuprofen are used to make your child feel more comfortable, but they do not treat the cause of the fever. If your child is irritable and distressed by the fever Paracetamol and Ibuprofen can be given by alternating the two medicines (always follow the instructions on the medicine bottles).
- Ensure your child drinks plenty of fluids.
- Dress in minimal clothing. Keep the room cool.
- Do not tepid sponge your child if they have a fever. This causes them to shiver which can make the temperature rise.
- Do not use a fan directly on to the child, only use to cool the room and to circulate the air around the room.
- Encourage plenty of fluids

A fever caused by an illness may contribute to dehydration. The fever itself can cause sweating; some children who become irritable with a fever do not drink as much as they need. Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids.

Signs of dehydration include:

- a dry mouth
- no tears
- reduced urine output – less wet nappies
- sunken eyes
- drowsiness
- generally becoming more unwell

Seek medical advice if you suspect your child is becoming dehydrated.

Look out for signs of serious illness.

A child with a fever may look quite unwell. They may look flushed and be irritable. However, most bouts of fever are not caused by serious illness, and the temperature often comes down quickly. It is quite common to see a child happily playing an hour or so later when their temperature has come down and they have had a good drink. They will not be entirely back to normal, but it is reassuring if your child improves with the drop in temperature. If your child has a serious infection they will usually get worse despite efforts to bring their temperature down. If your child is getting worse or developing new symptoms you should seek medical advice.

Febrile Convulsions/fits

Febrile convulsions are uncontrolled spasms that occur in children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years. They are surprisingly common; approximately 1 in 20 children will

have one before the age of 5 years. Convulsions, fits and seizures mean the same thing. Most occur with common illnesses such as ear infections, cough, colds and viral infections. The main treatment is aimed at the illness that caused the fever. Controlling the fever does not prevent the reoccurrence of a convulsion but does make the child feel more comfortable. It is unclear what triggers the convulsion; but it is possible that some body chemical is released during certain feverish illnesses that cause the convulsion rather than the temperature itself, as most children with a high temperature do not go on to have a convulsion.

If your child has a convulsion:

1. Keep calm
2. Make sure the area around your child is clear
3. Don't put anything in your child's mouth
4. If it their first convulsion or the convulsion lasts longer than 5 minutes seek medical advice immediately by calling 999
5. When the convulsion stops put your child on their side until they come round. Some children are sleepy afterwards

What to do if you're worried

If you're worried about your baby or child, call your GP practice.

If the practice is closed, call NHS 111 or contact your GP out-of-hours service – there will be a phone number on your GP's answerphone.

The doctor or nurse you speak to will ask you questions about your child's symptoms. Your answers will help them decide whether your child can be cared for at home or whether they should be seen at the GP practice, out-of-hours centre, or hospital.

Always get medical advice if:

- your baby is under 3 months old and they have a temperature of 38C (101F) or higher
- your baby is 3 to 6 months old and has a temperature of 39C (102F) or higher
- you think your child may be dehydrated
- your child develops a red rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it
- your child has a fit (convulsion)
- they're crying constantly and you can't console or distract them, or the cry doesn't sound like their normal cry
- has a high-pitched or unusual sound when crying
- the fever lasts for more than 5 days
- your child's health is getting worse
- you have any concerns about looking after your child at home

If you require this leaflet to be printed in to any other language please contact the Ethnic Health team on 0161 922 5150.

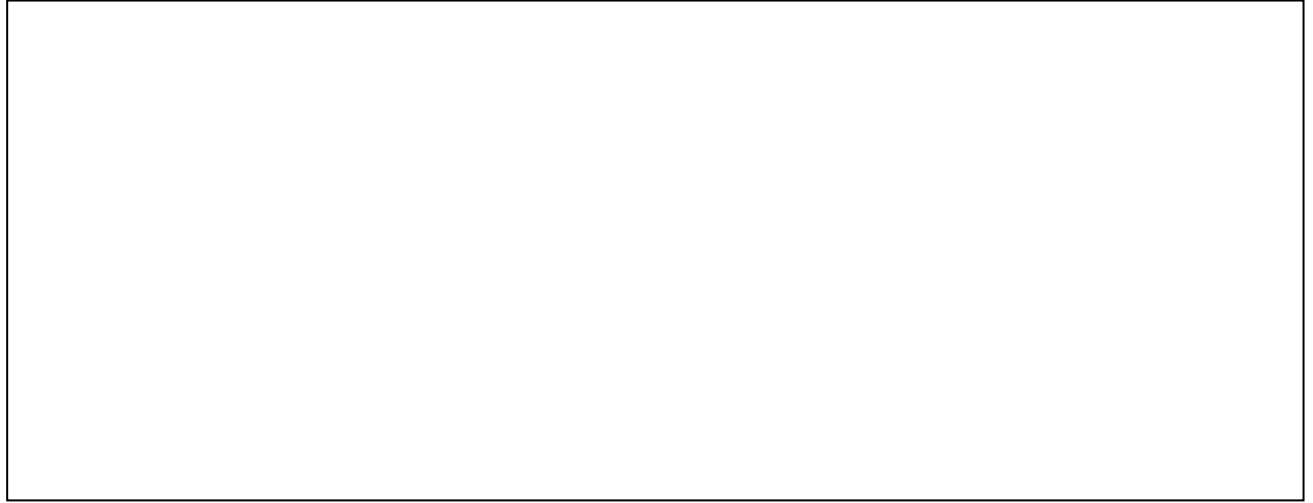
References.

NHS (2015) Fever in children – accessed 3.4.18

NHS (2016) Treating a fever in children – accessed 3.4.18

NHS (2017) How to take your child's temperature – accessed 3.4.18

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space below to remind you



If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

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