

# Fever in a child

## Children's Emergency Department Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

Fever is common in children. A fever or high temperature is part of the body's natural response to an infection. A fever is classed as a body temperature over 38°C. In most cases, a child with a fever is best cared for at home. This advice leaflet is designed to help you manage a fever confidently.

### What causes a fever?

In the early stages of a fever, it can be difficult to work out exactly what is causing the high temperature. Most often in children, a high temperature is caused by a viral illness which can cause common symptoms such as a cough, cold, sore throat, red eyes, earache, runny nose, vomiting and diarrhoea, and a rash that disappears when pressed. Later on in the illness, you may be able to identify the exact cause, such as a sore throat / tonsillitis or a chest infection.

## How should I care for a child with a fever?

- Allow your child to sleep and rest, and check on them regularly to ensure that they are easy to rouse.
- Offer frequent small amounts of fluid to ensure that your child does not become dehydrated. If they don't feel like eating, that is fine, but ensure they have fluids and substitute food with sugary squash.
- Current guidelines state that it is not necessary to reduce your child's high temperature with medicines as the fever is the body's natural and healthy response to an infection. However, if your child becomes distressed or is in pain, it is fine to use medicines to treat it – see the 'What medicines treat a fever?' section below.
- Check your child regularly for rashes, and if there is a rash present, ensure it disappears using the 'glass test'.

## What medicines treat a fever?

Paracetamol and ibuprofen can both be used to reduce a high temperature and ease pain. Please be aware of brand names (e.g. Calpol™ and Nurofen™), and ensure you know what drug (paracetamol or ibuprofen) is in the branded medicine to prevent giving your child too much of one type of drug.

Follow the instructions on the bottle carefully and give according to your child's age. These two medicines are safe to give together, however, it is advised to spread doses out evenly throughout the day, and you must ensure they have no more than four doses of paracetamol and three doses of ibuprofen in any 24 hour period.

Avoid giving ibuprofen if your child is dehydrated, has asthma or has reduced urine output.

## Rashes

If your child develops a rash, perform the 'glass test'. Press a clear glass tumbler over the rash, and if you can still see spots through the glass, seek medical attention **immediately**. This is called a 'non-blanching rash' (see figure 1).

If the rash disappears, it is unlikely to be a rash to be concerned about.

However, you should re-check the rash regularly to ensure it continues to disappear or 'blanch'. A rash can be difficult to see on darker skin, so check for rashes on lighter areas, such as the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet.



Figure 1: a non-blanching rash (image obtained from 'The Meningitis Foundation')

**If your child has a non-blanching rash, go to the Emergency Department immediately.**

## When should I be concerned?

You should seek medical advice (e.g. NHS 111, your GP, Accident and Emergency) if

- Your child has a fit/seizure.
- The fever lasts for more than five days.
- Your child develops a rash that does not disappear when you do the glass test (a non-blanching rash).
- Your child is under three months old and has a fever.
- Your child has not passed urine in the last 24 hours.
- Your child is displaying signs of dehydration, such as, a dry mouth, no tears, sunken eyes, a sunken fontanelle (the soft spot on a baby's head) and reduced urination.

The information in this leaflet has been obtained from The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE).

NICE. (2018). *Feverish Children - Management*. Available: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/feverish-children-management#!scenario>. Last accessed 14th August 2019.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/accident-emergency/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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