

## Paediatric department

# Fever (high temperature) in children

As a parent it can be worrying if your child has a fever. However, fevers in children are very common. Most of the time they get better on their own. This leaflet gives you information on how to look after your child if they have a fever.

## What is a fever?

- A fever is a body temperature over 38 degrees Celsius. It is usually the body's response to fight an infection, but can be also caused by other things, such as immunisations, or as part of an inflammatory reaction.
- The height of a temperature does not usually help to decide how unwell a child is (except in babies under 6 months old). Viral infections (which do not respond to antibiotics) can often make a child's temperature go very high.
- If your child has a high temperature and appears well, it may not be necessary to give medication as a fever is the body's response to help fight the infection.
- If your child is upset or distressed, you can give paracetamol or ibuprofen to help bring the temperature down. These medicines will not treat the cause of the fever but will help your child feel better. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are safe to give together, but you may find it more effective to alternate them, and never exceed the recommended dose on the medication packet.

## What are the physical signs of a fever?

Your child might:

- Feel hotter than usual to the touch on their forehead, back or tummy
- Feel sweaty, clammy or have red cheeks.

## How to measure your child's temperature

- **In babies and young children** - use a digital thermometer under their arm. These can be bought from a pharmacy or supermarket. Forehead scanning thermometers are not thought to be as reliable. In ear (tympanic thermometers) are difficult to use in very young children (under 6 months) as their ear canals are very small.
- **In older children** – use an in ear (tympanic) thermometer or digital thermometer placed under the child's arm or tongue.

We do not recommend the use of rectal (inside the bottom) or older style 'mercury' thermometers in children.

## What to do if your child has a fever

- Please monitor your child carefully at home and seek medical advice if you are worried
- Give your child plenty of fluids to drink
- Look out for signs of dehydration such as passing less urine than normal, complaining of thirst, or dark, sunken eyes.
- Give them food if they are hungry
- Check on your child overnight
- Give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen if they're distressed or unwell – always follow the advice on the packets, and never exceed the recommended dose for age.

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**Children should be kept off school or nursery if they have a fever. During the COVID-19 pandemic, please follow up-to-date Public Health advice for your local area on testing and isolating.**

## Do not...

- Undress your child or sponge them down to cool them. This may cause them to shiver and make the fever worse
- Cover them up in too many clothes or bedclothes
- Give aspirin to under 16-year olds'
- Exceed the recommended doses for paracetamol or ibuprofen (please read the packaging carefully)
- Give ibuprofen to children with asthma, unless they have had it before and were ok.

## Get an urgent GP appointment or call 111 if you child:

- Is under 3 months of age and has a temperature above 38 C, or they feel hot to touch
- Is 3-6 months of age and has a temperature above 39 C, or they feel very hot to touch
- Has other signs of illness, such as a rash, as well as a high temperature
- Has a high temperature that's lasted for more than 5 days

- Has a high temperature that doesn't come down with paracetamol or ibuprofen
- Is showing signs of dehydration such as passing less urine than normal, complaining of thirst, or dark, sunken eyes

## Call 999 or go to your nearest ED (A&E) if you child

- Has a fever you can't control having followed the advice on the sheet
- Has a stiff neck
- Has a rash that doesn't fade when you press a glass against it (the 'glass test')
- Is bothered by light
- Has a fit (febrile seizure) for the first time (if they are still shaking, please call 999)
- Has unusually cold hands and feet
- Has pale, blotchy, blue or grey skin
- Has a weak or high-pitched cry, that's not like their normal cry
- Is drowsy and hard to wake up, or finds it hard to stay awake
- Finds it hard to breathe and sucks their stomach in under their ribs
- Is a baby and has a soft spot on their head that curves outwards (bulging fontanelle).

## Further information

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

### Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)

PALS can provide information, advice and support to patients and relatives and will listen to and act on your concerns, suggestions or queries.

**020 8934 3993**

[khft.pals@nhs.net](mailto:khft.pals@nhs.net)

### Accessible information

We are actively working to make our patient information easier to read and accessible in a range of formats. If you would like this information in large print, audio or electronic format please speak to a member of staff in the department. If you need a different format, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request

### Pastoral & Spiritual Support Services

We offer a multi-cultural approach serving people of all faiths and life philosophies. A Duty Chaplain is available 24/7. You can request to speak to a Church of England or Roman Catholic Priest, the Rabbi or Imam.

**Please call the hospital switchboard on 020 8546 7711 and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain.**

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[www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk](http://www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk)