

Fever in Children (Updated Advice 2013)

A fever is an increase in your child's body temperature. Fevers are common, generally harmless and are part of the body's defences to fight infection. They are usually due to common infections such as coughs, colds and other viral infections. Almost all children recover quickly and without problems.

What can I do if my child has a fever?

- Make your child comfortable - see below
- Check for signs of dehydration or serious infection - see below
- Keep your child off school or nursery until better
- Seek medical help if concerned

Make your child comfortable

Fever is a natural response to infection and does not need reducing unless your child is distressed.

- Do not use fans or tepid sponging as this can be unpleasant for your child
- Offer your child plenty to drink but do not worry if they do not eat. If they are not keen to drink because they are distressed with the fever then treat this first with medication then offer them a drink half an hour or so later.
- Using medication - Paracetamol and Ibuprofen are both medicines that are used to lower the body temperature. The medicines will not treat the underlying cause of the fever. If your child is distressed with the fever then you can offer Paracetamol to help. If your child remains distressed despite the use of Paracetamol then a dose of Ibuprofen can be offered. The medicines should not be given at the same time and should not routinely be offered on an alternating basis. Use the medicine that seems to work best for your child. Always try Paracetamol first as it has less side effects than Ibuprofen. Bringing the fever down if the child is not distressed has been shown to be of no benefit at reducing the length or outcome of the illness. Continue medication only as long as the child appears distressed.

Check for signs of dehydration or serious illness

Most childhood illnesses with fever are not serious and get better on their own and will not need antibiotics. A child with a fever can look quite unwell but it is quite common to then see them playing happily an hour or so later when their temperature is down again. They will not be entirely back to normal but it is reassuring if your child improves with the drop in temperature.

If a child has a serious illness they will usually get worse despite efforts to bring their temperature down. Signs of a more serious illness include :-

- Irritability
- Drowsiness/hard to wake up
- Rash of purple/red spots that do not disappear when pressed with a glass
- Severe or continued vomiting and dry nappies/not passing urine
- Signs of dehydration - dry nappies/not passing urine, dry mouth, sunken eyes

- Neck stiffness
- Breathing problems
- Dislike of bright light
- A fit

Use your instincts. If you think your child is getting worse then seek medical help.

Adapted from NICE guidelines. Feverish illness in children. Clinical guideline CG 160 .2013
<http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG160>