

# Caring for a child under 5 years who has a fever

Information and advice for parents and carers

## *Paediatrics*

### **What is a fever?**

A fever is a body temperature that is higher than normal. A normal body temperature in children aged 1 and younger is 37.5°C - 37.7°C. A normal body temperature in children aged 2 - 5 years is 37.0°C - 37.2°C.

Fevers are very common in young children and are usually caused by a viral infection.

### **What to do when your child has a fever**

Most children will only have a mild fever so can be looked after at home and do not need any special treatment. The following advice will help you look after your child at home and know what symptoms to look out for.

#### **Keep your child hydrated**

It is important to make sure your child does not become dehydrated. To prevent dehydration offer your child regular drinks (if your child is breastfed the most appropriate drink is breastmilk).

If your child has any of the following symptoms encourage them to drink more fluids and seek further advice as they may be dehydrated:

- has a sunken or bulging fontanelle (soft spot on their head)
- has a dry mouth
- has sunken eyes
- is not producing tears

#### **Don't under-dress or over-dress your child**

Children with fever should not be under or over-dressed. If your child is shivering or sweating a lot, change the amount of clothes they are wearing.

#### **Only give them child paracetamol or ibuprofen if they are distressed or very unwell**

It's not necessary to use medicines such as child paracetamol or ibuprofen to treat your child's temperature, but if they are distressed or very unwell you can give either of these medicines to help them feel more comfortable.

Please read the instructions on the bottle first before giving these medicines and don't exceed the recommended dose. Start by giving your child just one of these medicines; if they haven't improved after 2 – 3 hours you can try giving the other. Don't give these medicines at the same time. Your local pharmacist can give you more advice about medicines for children.

#### **Don't sponge your child with water**

Sponging your child with water does not help to reduce their fever.

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### **Keep them off nursery or school**

Keep your child away from nursery or school while they have a fever and notify the school or nursery of the illness.

### **Check on your child regularly**

Check on your child regularly while they are unwell, including during the night, and look out for any of the symptoms under 'When to seek advice'.

If your child has a rash do the 'tumbler test' by pressing a glass tumbler firmly against the rash. If you can see the spots through the glass and they do not fade seek medical advice immediately as this could be a sign of meningitis. The rash is harder to see on dark skin so check paler areas such as palms of the hands, soles of the feet, tummy and under the eyelids.

### **When to seek help**

Please seek medical advice if your child:

- has a fit
- becomes more unwell
- develops a rash that doesn't disappear with pressure
- has a sunken or bulging fontanelle (soft spot on their head)
- has a dry mouth
- has sunken eyes
- is not producing tears
- still has a fever after 5 days
- is breathless or making extra effort to breathe
- is floppy or drowsy

You should also seek advice if you become more concerned about your child, are worried about looking after them at home or are concerned they are not improving.

If your child has been in hospital for their fever please contact the ward they were on.

If your child has not been in hospital please contact your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

In an emergency take your child to A&E.

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### Further information

For information about fever in children and how to take your child's temperature please visit:

#### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/feverchildren](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/feverchildren)

For more information about the symptoms of meningitis and how to do the tumbler/glass test please visit:

#### Meningitis Trust

[www.meningitis-trust.org](http://www.meningitis-trust.org)

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com) or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG47 'Feverish illness in children: Assessment and initial management in children younger than 5 years', May 2007
- British Journal of School Nursing, 'The feverish child: knowing what to do', October 2008

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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