

Fever

Over 38°C means a fever

If your child has a fever, he or she will have a body temperature above 38°C. Your child may also feel tired, look pale, have a poor appetite, be irritable, have a headache or other aches and pains and feel generally unwell. Take the temperature from the armpit in babies under 4 weeks old. Between 4 weeks and 5 years you can take the temperature from armpit or use an infra-red ear thermometer. However, bear in mind that these measurements are less accurate as the armpit is slightly cooler.

A fever is part of the body's natural response to fight infection and can often be left to run its course provided your child is drinking enough and is otherwise well. If your child is having trouble drinking, trying to reduce their temperature may help with this. This is important in preventing your child from becoming dehydrated, which can lead to more serious problems. As a guide, your child's urine should be pale yellow - if it is darker, your child may need to drink more fluids.

Fever is common in young children. They are usually caused by viral infections and clear up without treatment. If your child is otherwise playing and attentive it is unlikely that they are seriously ill. However, a fever can occasionally be a sign of a more serious illness such as a severe bacterial infection of the blood (septicaemia), urinary tract infection, pneumonia or meningitis.

You should also contact your GP if fever symptoms are not improving after 48 hours. Check your child during the night.

Always seek medical advice if your child develops a fever soon after an operation, or soon after travelling abroad.

GP says

When looking after a feverish child at home you should:

- Get the child to drink more (where a baby or child is breastfed the most appropriate fluid is breast milk).
- Look for signs of dehydration: fewer wet nappies, dry mouth, sunken eyes, no tears, poor overall appearance, sunken soft spot in babies. Other signs of more serious illness include breathlessness, vomiting, non-blanching rash and seizures.
- It is not advisable to give ibuprofen if your child is dehydrated.
- Know how to identify a non-blanching rash.
- Check child during the night.

Source: NICE, Feverish illness in children

Babies under six months

Always contact your GP, health visitor, practice nurse, nurse practitioner or local clinic GP if your baby has other signs of illness, as well as a raised temperature and/or if your baby's temperature is 38°C (102°F) or higher.

Older children

A little fever isn't usually a worry. Contact your GP if your child seems unusually ill, or has a high temperature which doesn't come down. If your child feels unwell or distressed by the fever then medication such as paracetamol can help bring the temperature down.

1

My child is hot and grumpy.

2

Have you tried paracetamol or ibuprofen in the correct recommended dose for your child? Have you made sure they are drinking lots of fluids (little amounts of water often)? Dress your child

in clothing that will keep them cool. Keep room at comfortable temperature (18°C).

3

If their temperature remains over 38°C and doesn't come down, contact your GP.

Source: DoH Birth to five edition 2009.