



A guide to...

All about temperatures

Patient Information

If your baby is less than three months old with a temperature above 38°C, or three to six months with a temperature of more than 39°C, you must seek immediate medical review.

Children's Emergency Department (CED)

Watford General Hospital



Your child has had a temperature. Fever, also known as temperature or pyrexia, is when the body temperature rises above its normal value and it is one of the most common reasons that parents seek medical assessment of their child.

Most cases of fever are caused by self-limiting, viral illnesses that require only minimal intervention and can be safely managed at home.

Body temperature changes frequently throughout the day — this is normal and you do not need to routinely check your child. If you are concerned that your child may have a fever, then it can be measured in a range of different places; commonly and most effectively the armpit, the ear and mouth can also be used. Forehead temperature measurement is not considered to be reliable, especially in children.

Why do fevers happen?

Fever is a normal and healthy immune response to infection. The germs that cause infections do not like to be hot, so when our bodies detect germs, it increases our temperature to stop them from reproducing, therefore slowing down or stopping the illness. This is a normal defensive mechanism and how hot your child becomes is dependent on both the child and the germ. **It does not indicate how well or unwell they are.**

HOTTING UP!

During the period where body temperature is rising, normal things you may see include:

- Shivering — this is the muscular response to make us hotter
- Huddling up — to retain heat
- Feeling cold

These signs remain until the temperature peaks. While their body is trying to make them hot, it is also trying to stop them from getting too hot too quickly! As a result of changes happening within their bodies to support this process, it is common to have:

- Cooler arms and legs which may appear pale or mottled (marbled)
- A fast heart and breathing rate.
- Reduced appetite or vomiting

Once the higher temperature is reached, normal body responses resume and the symptoms will resolve. Your child will likely appear more comfortable, will feel warm to touch all over and may have flushed cheeks. They will probably be happier to eat or drink at this point.

Their temperature may remain higher for some time as the body is fighting the infection, and it is quite normal for the temperature to rise and fall during the course of the illness.

COOLING DOWN!

Once the infection has been fought, the body can start to cool down again. This process leads to:

- Flushed appearance
- Sweating
- Heart rate returns to normal
- Increased appetite and willingness to drink
- More relaxed posture
- Your child will be likely be more interactive and interested in their surroundings.

Should I give medicine to bring the temperature down?

The routine use of medicines (antipyretics) to reduce temperature is **not** advised. The long term effect of regularly giving these is unclear and there is increasing evidence that demonstrates the importance of fever for the development of the immune system. Together with risks of overdosing and long-term liver damage, NICE (National Institute for Health & Care Excellence) recommends that these should **only** be given when the child is distressed and **not** with the sole intentions of reducing the temperature. This guideline also recommends that one should be given, either paracetamol or ibuprofen, and the use of the other should only be considered if the child is distressed by the symptoms of fever before the next dose is due.

Caring for your child with fever

- Remove most clothing and consider covering with a light sheet — this will allow cooling but prevent your child from becoming too cold.
- Tepid sponging or bathing in cool water should NOT be done as this is likely to induce shivering and cause further distress.
- Offer cool drinks regularly to help rehydrate your child and promote cooling.
- Do NOT give medication with the sole intention of reducing body temperature — fever is a normal response to infection and may be beneficial in the development of the immune system.
- Do NOT give antipyretics to prevent febrile convulsions — these do not prevent febrile convulsions and should not be used specifically for this purpose.
- <https://hwehealthiertogether.nhs.uk/>

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



Author	Sian Edwards
Department	Children's Emergency Department
Ratified / Review Date	January 2025 / January 2028
ID Number	40/2386/V1

