

# Fever in under 5s: assessment and initial management

Information for the public

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## Fever in children under 5: the care you should expect

Babies and young children sometimes develop a high temperature (fever). Almost all children with a fever recover quickly and without problems. Rarely, a fever does not improve or the child becomes more unwell. This can sometimes be a sign of a serious illness or infection, such as pneumonia, a urine infection or meningitis, which needs to be treated straightaway. It is important for doctors and other healthcare professionals to be able to judge when a child can be cared for at home and when they may need more tests and treatment.

We want this guideline to make a difference to families with a baby or child who has a fever by making sure:

- a parent worried about their child is always taken seriously
- doctors can recognise signs that could be a serious illness or infection as early as possible
- antibiotics are only offered when they are really needed
- parents get the right advice about caring for their child at home.

## Advice for parents and carers

Your healthcare professional should give you clear information about how to care for your child at home and when to get more advice.

They should explain:

- how to use paracetamol or ibuprofen to make your child feel more comfortable if they are distressed (always following the instructions on the packet or bottle)
- how to tell if your child is dehydrated – having a sunken fontanelle (the soft spot on a baby's head), dry mouth, sunken eyes, no tears
- that you should not try to reduce the fever by under or overdressing your child or sponging them with water.

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

## Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about caring for a child with a fever.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Action for Sick Children](#), 0161 486 6788
- [Meningitis Research Foundation](#), 080 8800 3344
- [Meningitis Now](#), 0808 80 10 388

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with professionals who have experience in caring for children with feverish illness and families who have been affected by it. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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