

PORTFOLIO SAMPLE · MD-REVIEWED HEALTH CONTENT · SERVICE LINE B

# Fever in children: *when to worry.*

A fever can be frightening to watch — but most of the time it's a sign your child's body is doing exactly what it should. Here's how to tell an ordinary fever from one that needs a doctor.

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## — WHAT A FEVER ACTUALLY IS

When your child feels hot and the thermometer climbs, worry is natural. The good news: fever itself is rarely dangerous. It's the body's normal response to infection — a sign the immune system is working. What matters is not the number on the thermometer, but how your child looks and behaves, and their age.

A fever is a body temperature of **38 °C (100.4 °F) or higher**. It isn't an illness on its own; it's a symptom — usually of a common viral infection that will pass on its own. A high number doesn't automatically mean serious illness, and a mild one doesn't rule it out. A child at 39 °C who is drinking, playing and alert is often less concerning than a quieter child with a lower reading. **Treat the child, not the thermometer.**

### The one rule that changes everything: age

**Babies under 3 months:** any fever of 38 °C (100.4 °F) or higher needs medical attention straight away. Don't give fever medicine on your own first — have your baby seen. At this age, fever can be the only early sign of a serious infection. Between 3 and 6 months, a fever is worth a call to your doctor. For older, otherwise-well children you usually have more room to watch and comfort them at home — while staying alert to the warning signs below.

### ⚠️ SEEK CARE IF YOUR CHILD HAS

- Trouble breathing, fast breathing, or pauses in breathing
- Unusual drowsiness, or is very hard to wake
- A rash that does not fade when you press a glass against it
- A stiff neck, a bulging soft spot, or strong dislike of light
- Repeated vomiting, or signs of dehydration: no wet nappies, no tears, a dry mouth
- A seizure, or a fever lasting more than about 5 days
- Simply looks very unwell to you — trust your instinct

### — CARING FOR A FEVER AT HOME

For most children, the aim is comfort, not chasing a normal number:

- Offer fluids often — small, frequent sips. Staying hydrated matters more than the temperature itself.
- Keep clothing light and the room comfortable. Don't bundle a feverish child in heavy layers.
- Fever medicines can help comfort — acetaminophen (paracetamol), and ibuprofen for children over six months — dosed by your child's weight, following the package or your doctor's guidance. Use them to help your child feel better, not to force the number down.
- Never give aspirin to children, because of its link to a rare but serious condition (Reye syndrome).

### — MYTHS WORTH DROPPING

- ✓ Fever doesn't **"cook the brain."** Ordinary fevers from infection don't reach harmful levels on their own.
- ✓ You don't need to **wake a sleeping child** just to give medicine. Rest helps.
- ✓ Skip **cold baths and alcohol rubs** — they cause shivering and distress without helping.
- ✓ **Febrile seizures** look terrifying but are usually brief and harmless. Still, a first one should always be checked by a doctor.

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### THE BOTTOM LINE

A fever is usually a sign of a body fighting back, not a crisis. Watch how your child looks and acts, remember the under-3-months rule, know the warning signs — and when something feels wrong, ask. No good clinician minds a careful parent's question.

### FUENTES / SOURCES

Guidance here is consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the World Health Organization, and the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). General education; does not replace advice from your own doctor.