



# High temperature – fever in children

Advice for parents and guardians from the  
Health Service Executive (HSE)

Source: [www2.hse.ie/conditions/high-temperature/](http://www2.hse.ie/conditions/high-temperature/)

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# High temperature – fever in children

A normal temperature is between 36 and 36.8 degrees Celsius.

In children, any temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above is considered high. High temperature is common in young children. The temperature usually returns to normal in 3 or 4 days.

A temperature above 38 degrees Celsius is usually a sign of an infection such as a cold. But it can also be due to more serious infections, so it's important to look at all your child's symptoms.

Even if they do not have a high temperature, they may still be seriously ill.

## Symptoms of a high temperature in children

High temperatures are usually caused by minor illnesses. But they can be a sign of serious infections. It's important to check that your child is alert and responding to you.

### Get medical help immediately if:

- you are worried that your child may be seriously ill even if there is no high temperature

Your child can still be sick even without a high temperature.

There is a low risk of serious illness if your child:

- is content and smiling
- stays awake
- is taking drinks
- is responding normally to people

There is a high risk of serious illness if your child:

- cannot be woken up or if woken, does not stay awake
- has a weak or high-pitched continuous cry
- has pale or blotchy skin
- keeps vomiting
- is grunting, if they are a baby, or breathing very fast

## Checking a temperature

If your child has a high temperature they might:

- feel hotter than usual to touch - on their forehead, back or tummy
- feel sweaty or clammy
- have red cheeks

## Digital thermometers

The best way to check your child's temperature is with a digital thermometer.

You can buy a digital thermometer at a pharmacy, supermarket or online. The thermometer will come with instructions.

Do not take your child's temperature immediately after a bath or when they're wrapped in warm clothing. You will not get an accurate result.

## Treatment for a child with a fever

It's rare for a fever to be a sign of anything serious.

You can usually look after your child or baby at home. The temperature should go down over 3 or 4 days.

You should:

- dress your child normally - do not underdress them or overwrap them in clothes
- give your child plenty of fluids
- give your child food if they want it
- check on your child regularly during the night

Do not use a cool cloth or sponge to get their temperature down.

## Medicines to treat a fever

Use either paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce your child's temperature and to relieve the pain. Talk to your pharmacist for advice.

Do not give aspirin to children under 12 years of age.

Start by giving your child either paracetamol or ibuprofen. If the one you started with does not work, try giving them the other.

Make sure to leave:

- 4 to 6 hours between each dose of paracetamol
- 6 to 8 hours between each dose of ibuprofen

Do not give more than the recommended dose for your child's weight.

You can give your child paracetamol and ibuprofen if they are on an antibiotic. An antibiotic will not reduce a fever or relieve pain.

## When to get help

### Contact a GP urgently if your child:

- is under 3 months old and has a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher, or you think they have a fever
- is 3 to 6 months old and has a temperature of 39 degrees Celsius or higher, or you think they have a fever
- has other signs of illness, such as a rash, as well as a high temperature
- has a high temperature that has lasted for more than 5 days
- does not want to eat, or isn't their usual self and you're worried
- has a high temperature that does not come down with paracetamol or ibuprofen. The temperature does not need to come down to normal, 38 degrees Celsius is fine. Children usually have a temperature for at least 3 days with most infections
- is showing signs of dehydration – such as nappies that aren't very wet, sunken eyes, and no tears when they're crying
- becomes more unwell after you have received advice

### Call 112 or 999, or go to your emergency department (ED) if your child:

- has a fever you cannot control
- has a stiff neck
- has a rash that does not fade when you press a glass against it
- is bothered by light
- has a fit for the first time
- has unusually cold hands and feet
- has pale, blotchy, blue or grey skin
- has a weak, high-pitched cry that's not like their normal cry
- is drowsy and hard to wake
- finds it hard to breathe and sucks their stomach in under their ribs
- has a soft spot on their head that curves outwards (bulging fontanelle)

## **COVID-19**

A fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above) can be a symptom of COVID-19.

### **Going back to school**

Do not send your child to school or creche with a high temperature.

They can return if they are feeling well and have not had a high temperature or any new symptoms for 48 hours.

If your child has vomiting or diarrhoea they must not return to school until 48 hours after their last bout of vomiting or diarrhoea.