

Fever in Children

What is a fever?

A fever is when the body's temperature is higher than normal. Fever is the body's natural response to infection. Raising the body temperature helps fight off the infection, so it is not necessary to treat the fever itself.

It is normal for children to have mild infections that cause fever. The younger the child, the more often they occur. Infections are very common when children have contact with other children, for example, when they start day care or school.

It is usual for children to get between five and ten infections a year and often two or three will occur in a row. At times it may seem that they are never well, but this is not necessarily anything to worry about.

What causes fever?

Most fevers are caused by viruses such as the common cold. Much less commonly fevers can be caused by a bacterial infection, for example, ear, throat and urinary tract infections.

What usually happens?

The first sign that your child has an infection is that they are often a little off colour. You might then notice a fever, loss of energy and some irritability. They may not want to eat or play normally. Most viruses last about a week, but the first few days are the worst.

Caring for a child with fever

If your child is very hot and uncomfortable you can try these simple steps:

- Undress your child so they do not overheat any further. Minimal clothing in a warm room is ideal. A cool environment will encourage shivering which will increase the fever.
- Give paracetamol only if your child is distressed or uncomfortable, but not for fever alone.
- Don't be too worried that your child is not eating, but make sure your child is drinking adequately. Try offering small amounts frequently.
- Most viral infections do not need specific treatment. A bacterial infection may need antibiotics and the doctor will assess the need for these.



When to seek help

You should see a doctor if you are worried about your child or if your child has any of the following:

- headache or neck pain
- lethargy or sleepiness
- marked irritability
- they look sicker than you would expect from a minor infection eg, very pale
- pain when passing urine, or abdominal pain
- rash
- if your baby is less than three months and has a fever.

If you have any other concerns take your child to the GP or Emergency Department.



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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