

## head to toe

Like most parents, you are very likely to face a time when you realise, to your horror, that your child's forehead is burning. Naturally, any illness or discomfort your precious darling may have is bound to deeply distress you. But should you play it cool or fly into a grand panic? Before you decide, a few basics are in order.

### Reasons to stay cool

To set the record straight, fever itself is harmless; it is usually the body's response to infection. When harmful germs attack the body, the temperature control centre of the brain will turn up the heat and activate more white blood cells and antibodies to fight off the invaders.

We all know that a normal body temperature is usually around 37 °C. Of course, this fluctuates between 36.1 °C and 37.4 °C throughout the day. However, when the central temperature (taken from the rectum or ear) is above 38 °C, or the oral or axillary temperature is above 37.5 °C, a person is considered to be down with fever.

Here's what to do if your child is running a temperature:

- 1) Keep his temperature below 39 °C with medication, light dressing and plenty of fluids.
- 2) Do not bundle him as this will cause his temperature to rise further. If he is shivering or feels cold, you may cover him with a light cloth.
- 3) In the event that fever remains high despite medication, wet him with lukewarm water – the body will cool down when the water evaporates.
- 4) Fever medication can easily be obtained at the pharmacy but it is important to keep to the dosage recommended by your doctor or pharmacist. Common anti-fever medication includes paracetamol syrup and ibuprofen. Aspirin should not be given to young children unless specified by the doctor.
- 5) Monitor your child closely for dehydration and encourage him to drink more fluids.

### When to be concerned

Fever is generally harmless, except in an infant less than six months old. Nevertheless, you are advised to monitor your child's condition closely. If you notice the following signs and symptoms,



# Fire fighting

## Should you be alarmed if your child is running a temperature?

bring them to the attention of your doctor immediately:

- Persistent high fever despite medication
- Dehydration, i.e. your child is not drinking well and not passing urine
- The worsening of symptoms or new symptoms
- A seizure
- Persistent vomiting
- Persistent headache
- Rapid breathing, paleness and rashes
- A stiff neck or a bulging soft spot on the head
- A sudden change in behaviour such as lethargy, drowsiness or irritability
- Recurrent fever over a few days

### What to do during a seizure?

Febrile seizures in children can occur from many causes including a rapid rise in body temperature or infections in the brain. During seizures, the child's eyes rolls, and his body stiffens up and starts jerking. Occurring in about three per cent of children between six months to six years of age, simple febrile seizures are harmless and last for less than five minutes.

Here's what to do if your child has a febrile seizure:

- 1) Place him on his side and remove any hard objects near him. Place cushions around him to protect him from injury.
- 2) Keep his airways open and turn his face towards the floor to allow any secretions or vomitus to drain out so that they will not choke him. Do not attempt to pry open his mouth with your fingers or with any objects. This may harm your child.
- 3) If your child has a high fever, lower it by undressing him and sponging him with tepid water. You may also use a fan to help lower temperature. If suppositories for fever and fits have been prescribed for your child, let him take them.
- 4) As soon as the seizure stops, seek medical advice immediately.

Fever usually subsides within three to four days, but in the meantime, it is not only important to monitor your child's body temperature, it is also important to monitor the overall behaviour of your child and watch for other signs and symptoms of illness. Whenever in doubt, consult your doctor without delay. ♥

*This article is contributed by Dr Irene Chan, consultant paediatrician and intensivist, iKids Paediatric Practice.*