

Febrile Convulsions

Information for parents and carers



What are febrile convulsions?

A febrile convulsion is a fit or seizure that is caused by a high temperature. It is not known exactly why some children have febrile convulsions. Children are often brought to the Emergency Department having had a febrile convulsion. It happens to approximately one in twenty children and most commonly in children under the age of five.

Young children can suffer from various common illnesses and infections such as colds, ear infections, tonsillitis, kidney or urine infections. These can cause very high temperatures and occasionally lead to a febrile convulsion.

Convulsions are not caused by children becoming hot from being active or by hot weather.

What are the symptoms of a febrile convulsion?

Most febrile convulsions last between 1 to 5 minutes.

- Your child will look hot and flushed.
- They may become dazed and confused.
- They may fall to the floor.
- Your child's muscles will tighten; this may cause them to moan or cry out.
- Your child may hold their breath for up to 30 seconds. They might look a bit blue in the face.
- The muscles in their arms, legs and body may twitch and shake.
- Their eyes may roll backwards.
- Many children lose control of their bowel or bladder or may bite their tongue.
- Your child may be sleepy afterwards.

Will my child suffer discomfort or pain during a convulsion?

No, your child will be unconscious (not be aware of their surroundings) and unaware of what is happening. You may find the convulsion much more upsetting than it is for your child.

Febrile convulsions are unlikely to cause any harm or damage, but rarely injuries can occur during a convulsion (if your child falls against a hard surface, for example).

Is it epilepsy?

No. Epilepsy means repeated convulsions, usually without a high temperature. Epilepsy normally affects older children and adults.

Will it happen again?

Many children never have more than one episode, but if your child was over the age of one year when they had the febrile convulsion they have a one in three chance of it happening again. If your child is under one, the chance of having another febrile convulsion is higher than this.

How can I prevent a febrile convulsion from happening again?

Febrile convulsions usually occur at the start of an illness, when your child's temperature is rising rapidly.

- Children lose heat through their skin, so remove any extra clothing they are wearing. Your child may be shivering due to being hot rather than cold, but this does not mean that they need covering up. Stripping your child down to their underwear or nightwear is ideal, but avoid fleecy pyjamas.
- Encourage your child to drink lots of fluids or to have frequent feeds if they are breastfed. Clear fluids such as water are ideal for older children.
- Think about giving your child paracetamol or ibuprofen, especially if they are very hot or uncomfortable. You can give these two painkillers together.

Paracetamol can be given every 4 hours but do not give more than four doses in 24 hours.

Ibuprofen can be given every 6-8 hours. Do not give more than 3 doses of ibuprofen in 24 hours.

Things you should not do:

- Do not wrap your child in a blanket.
- Do not put extra clothes on your child.
- Do not take your child into bed with you, the heat from your body could increase their temperature. Similarly, if you need to bathe your child make sure the bath water is not too warm.
- Do not use a flannel or sponge to cool your child with water. This does not help reduce a fever.

What to do if your child has another convulsion

- Stay calm. Remember that a convulsion is unlikely to cause any harm or damage. Make a note of the time the convulsion started.
- Lay your child on their side with their head slightly tipped back, to keep their airway clear. Move any hard or sharp objects away from your child.
- Loosen any clothing, especially around their neck.
- Ensure their mouth is empty but never force anything between their teeth or gums, especially not your fingers, as they may suddenly clench their teeth. If they spit anything out, wipe it away from their lips.
- **If your child holds their breath for longer than 30 seconds, dial 999 immediately.**
- **If the convulsion lasts for longer than 5 minutes, call 999 immediately.**
- If the convulsion is short, call your GP or 111 as soon as possible for advice.

Further questions

Please contact your local Emergency Department if you have any questions about your child after leaving hospital.

John Radcliffe Hospital – Children’s Emergency Department

(24 hour)

Tel: 01865 857 710

01865 857 711

01865 857 712

John Radcliffe, Minor Emergencies

(24 hour)

Tel: 01865 220 208

Horton General Hospital – Emergency Department

(24 hour)

Tel: 01295 229 415

01295 229 416

Alternatively, you can contact your local GP or NHS 111 (Freephone) for non-urgent advice.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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