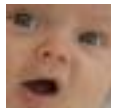


Is my baby ill?

Keeping your tot safe and well is your priority, but the signs of illness can be hard to spot. Dr Dawn Harper has some advice



Recognising illness in a baby under six months can be tricky. They can't tell you where it hurts and symptoms tend to be vague. The important thing is to know what's normal, and knowing your child's temperature is a good start.

TAKING A TEMPERATURE

Normal body temperature for a baby is around 36.9°C (98.4°F), although this varies. Take your baby's temperature when he's well so that you know what's 'normal' for him. Digital thermometers, placed in the ear, are probably the easiest to use. If you don't have one, a mercury thermometer can be popped either in the mouth (for one minute) or under the arm (for two to three minutes). Always add 0.5°C to an armpit reading to give you the correct lower external body temperature.

If you do find a fever (over 39°C), keep your baby cool: strip him off, sponge him with tepid water and give him infant paracetamol as directed.

COUGHS AND COLDS

Coughs and colds are the most common health problems in babies. A bunged up nose will

leave your baby snuffly and can make it difficult for him to feed. Boiling a kettle in the room or placing damp towels on a warm radiator will moisten the air, making it easier for your baby to breathe. Menthol drops on the mattress also help clear the airways and saline nasal drops from Tesco Pharmacy can be gently squirted into the nose – they make your baby sneeze, clearing his nose beautifully.

See your doctor if:

- Your baby is short of breath.
- Your baby has a blue tinge to his skin or lips.
- Your baby cannot sleep because of his cough.
- Things are not improving after three or four days.

DIARRHOEA AND VOMITING

These are common problems that, in most cases, settle within a few days without the need for specific treatment. The important thing is to keep your baby well hydrated by offering him fluids little and often. A bottle-fed baby may have a temporary lactose intolerance. If so, dilute his milk by half with cool, boiled water for a few days. Signs that your baby is

becoming dehydrated include a sunken fontanelle (the soft spot on top of his head), dry nappies and lethargy.

See your doctor if:

- Your baby seems dehydrated.
- There is blood in his vomit or diarrhoea.
- Your baby is floppy or lifeless.
- His condition hasn't improved after a few days.

EAR INFECTIONS

One in 10 babies will have had a middle ear infection by three months, but they can be difficult to spot in the early stages, as often a baby just seems fractious with a slight temperature. If the infection builds up, however, there is a risk that the eardrum will burst. If this happens, you'll see a discharge, that may be blood-stained, coming from the ear. While disconcerting for parents, the baby will be instantly happier, as this relieves the pain caused by pressure in the middle ear. →

See your doctor if:

- Your baby has a fever with no obvious cause.
- You notice mucky discharge.



Meningitis is rightly feared by parents, and needs urgent medical attention

MENINGITIS

Meningitis is quite rightly feared by parents, and requires urgent medical attention. Initially, the symptoms of this illness can be tricky to spot as they sometimes look like flu, with the added difficulty is that the classic signs of neck stiffness and dislike of bright lights aren't present in small children.

See your doctor if:

- Your baby has a high fever (over 39°C) you can't lower.
- He has pale, blotchy skin with cold hands and feet, despite having a temperature.
- He has a rash that doesn't fade on pressure (roll a glass over the rash to find out).
- Your baby's fontanelle (soft spot on the head) is bulging.
- Your baby has a strange, high-pitched cry.
- Other symptoms, such as a stiff neck or sensitivity to light.

**TO IMMUNISE OR NOT?**

Scary headlines may have frightened many parents over the safety of vaccinations in recent years, so to set the record straight, today's immunisations are actually safer than ever, while sadly the diseases that they protect against are not. You should try to have your baby vaccinated as close to the two-, three- and four-month deadlines as possible. Premature babies, in particular, are most at risk from infection, so don't be tempted to delay their immunisations and stick to the same schedule even though they were born early. Always leave a month's gap between immunisations, or the jab may have to be redone.

Seeing just one child who has been handicapped by a preventable case of meningitis is enough to have you running down to the surgery as fast as your legs will carry you. ■

**CALL AN AMBULANCE IF:**

- ✱ Your baby is unconscious.
- ✱ He is choking and you can't remove the object quickly and easily.
- ✱ He is having severe difficulty breathing: signs include blue lips, an obvious struggle to breathe, and flaring nostrils.
- ✱ He has had a fit. If he seems fine then drive him to your nearest A&E; otherwise call an ambulance right away.
- ✱ He is ill and has a purple-red rash anywhere on his body. This could be a sign of meningitis (see left), especially if the rash does not disappear when you press a glass tumbler on it.

✱ **Nurofen for Children*** gets to work in just 15 minutes, provides up to eight hours of fever relief and comes with a unique easy dosing syringe. Contains ibuprofen. Always read the label. Available from your Tesco Pharmacy, **£5.69 for 200ml** (£2.85/100ml).



* Suitable from three months (weighing over 5kg)