

Fever in babies under 3 months

Information for families

What do we mean by fever?

Fever is a body temperature of 38 degrees and over. In babies, particularly those under 3 months old, a fever is taken very seriously - even if your baby seems well. This is because young babies do not yet have a fully functioning immune system, and the risk of serious infection is significant.

Why does it matter?

- Babies' immune systems are still developing, so they can't fight infections as well as older children.
- Babies cannot tell you what is wrong, so a fever may be the only early sign of a serious infection
- Because serious infections can develop quickly at this age, it is important that your baby is reviewed promptly and appropriate tests are done

What tests will be done?

To help diagnose the cause of a fever in babies, there are a few different tests that might be done. The healthcare professional looking after your baby will explain which test they need and why.

Below is an overview of some of the tests we might do for your baby.

- **Blood tests:**

A small drip is inserted into your baby's hand or foot and a sample of blood is taken.

- This gives us information about your baby's infection markers and can help to guide further testing.
- A small amount of blood is also sent for blood culture. The laboratory will review the blood under the microscope looking for visible bacteria. The blood is then cultured for 48 hours in the laboratory to see if any bacteria grow, which tells us whether there is a **bloodstream infection**.

- **Urine culture (test):**

A urine sample is collected — either by catching a clean sample in a pot or by using a tiny tube (catheter) if needed.

- This test checks for a **urinary tract infection (UTI)**, which is a common cause of fever in babies.
- The laboratory will review the urine under the microscope looking for visible bacteria. The urine is then cultured for 48 hours in the laboratory to see if any bacteria grow.

- **Lumbar puncture (LP):**

A small sample of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord is taken using a very fine needle that is inserted into the lower back.

- The fluid is tested for bacteria and viruses that could be causing meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain).
- The laboratory will review the spinal fluid under the microscope looking for visible bacteria. The spinal fluid is then cultured for 48 hours in the laboratory to see if any bacteria or viruses grow.

- **Throat swabs:**

Your baby will have a throat swab taken looking for common viruses that can cause a fever.

- **Other tests:**

Your baby might have other tests done such as swabs, poo samples or a chest X-ray depending on the symptoms they have.

How long will my baby be in hospital for?

Every baby's hospital journey is slightly different. Most babies will be admitted to hospital and started on antibiotics through a drip to help protect them from serious infection while we await test results. Often, this means a minimum of 48 hours receiving antibiotics through a drip in hospital while we wait for the culture results from the blood, urine and spinal fluid (if taken).

If the urine culture results are negative and your baby is well: we can safely stop antibiotics and discharge you home.

If the urine culture results are positive or there are concerns about your baby: this will require a longer course of antibiotics, which may be through a drip or by mouth. This will depend on the specific culture results and the bacteria grown.

Further Information

You will be able to discuss this further with the medical paediatric team.

It's OK to Ask

When you understand what's going on with your health, you can make better decisions around your care and treatment.

www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/its-ok-to-ask/



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