NHS

If your child is poorly

A quick guide for parents and carers of young children

What you can do to help your child

Set up a medicine cabinet at home

This booklet gives you advice to help treat your child at home when they have a common childhood illness like a cough, a cold or sickness and diarrhoea. Also included is some advice about asthma.

Most of the time you can treat minor illnesses at home. It is a good idea to have a medicine cabinet that is well out of reach to children. You could keep a thermometer, plasters, creams for nappy rash and painkillers for children such as paracetamol or ibuprofen in your cabinet.

Always make sure you use the right strength of medicine for the age of your child and sugar-free options where you can. Read the instructions carefully and check use by dates.

Where can I get more help?
You know your child better than anyone else but if you are still worried the back page of this booklet has details of where you can get more help.

If you need more information after reading this booklet, you can also visit the NHS website - **www.nhs.uk**

You can also use this website to find your nearest GP practice, pharmacy or hospital.

Asthma

Asthma is a common lung condition that causes occasional breathing difficulties and often starts in childhood. There's currently no cure, but there are simple treatments that can help keep the symptoms under control so it doesn't have a big impact on your child's life.

The main symptoms of asthma are:

- wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing)
- breathlessness
- a tight chest
- coughing (especially at night).

The symptoms can sometimes get temporarily worse. This is known as an asthma attack.

If you think your child has asthma please contact your GP practice. Several conditions can cause similar symptoms, so it's important to get a medical diagnosis and correct treatment. Your GP will usually be able to diagnose asthma by asking about symptoms and carrying out some simple tests.

What can cause asthma?

Asthma is caused by swelling (inflammation) of the breathing tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. This makes the tubes highly sensitive so they temporarily narrow. It may occur randomly or after exposure to a trigger.

Common asthma triggers include:

- allergies – to house dust mites, animal fur or pollen
- cigarette smoke, pollution and cold air
- infections such as colds or flu.

How to treat asthma

Asthma is usually treated by using an inhaler, a small device that lets your child breathe in medicines. It's important to **always** use a plastic device called a spacer with the inhaler. You can ask your GP for a spacer if your child does not have one.

The main types of inhalers are:

- **preventer inhalers** which should be used every day. To make sure your child uses it daily you could suggest they use it before they clean their teeth. It's **really** important your child uses their inhaler as it will help prevent asthma attacks.
- **reliever inhalers** which can be used to quickly relieve asthma symptoms for a short time. If your child is using a reliever more than three times a week then their asthma is not well controlled so please make an appointment to see your GP or asthma nurse.

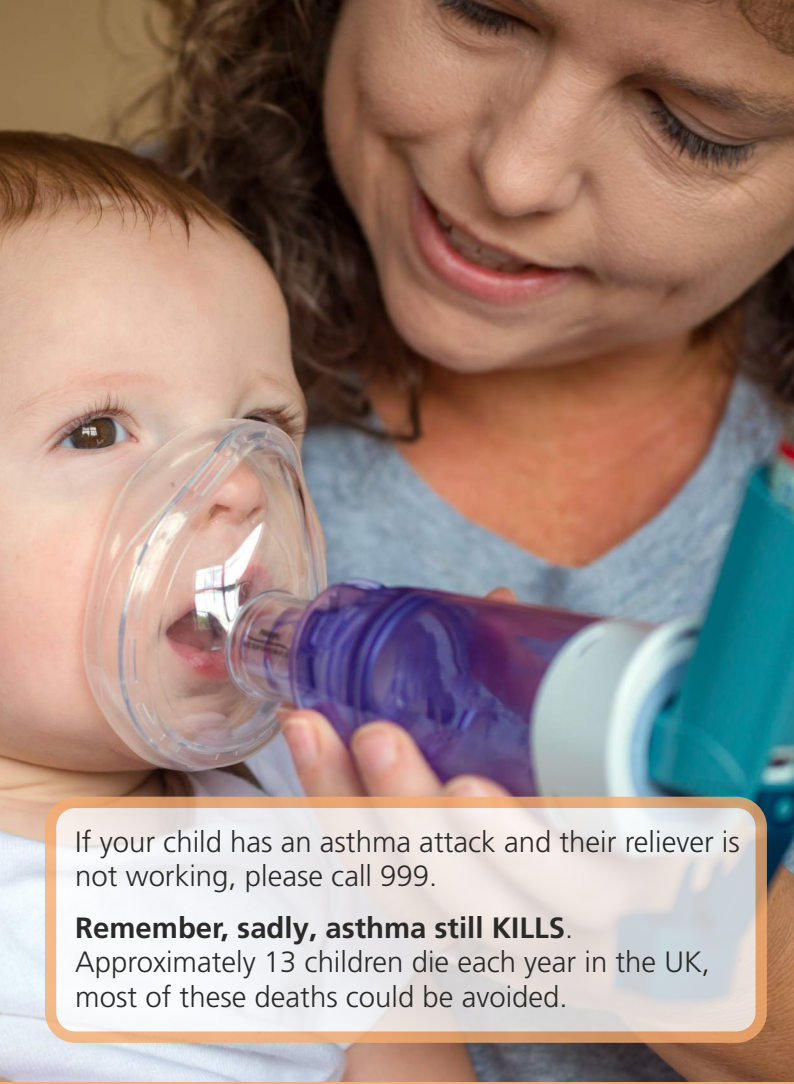
How long does it last?

Asthma is a long-term condition for many. In children, it sometimes disappears or improves during the teenage years, but it can come back later in life. The symptoms can usually be controlled with treatment and most people live normal, active lives.

Although asthma can usually be kept under control, it's still a serious condition that can cause a number of problems. This is why it's so important to follow your child's treatment plan and not ignore their symptoms if they're getting worse. Badly controlled asthma can cause problems such as:

- feeling tired all the time
- underperformance at or absence from school
- lung infections (pneumonia)
- delays in growth or puberty.

There's also a risk of severe asthma attacks which can be life-threatening.



If your child has an asthma attack and their reliever is not working, please call 999.

Remember, sadly, asthma still KILLS.
Approximately 13 children die each year in the UK, most of these deaths could be avoided.

Colds, coughs and croup

Colds

It's normal for children to have a lot of colds each year. This is because there are hundreds of different cold viruses and young children have no immunity to any of them as they've never had them before. Children will gradually build up immunity and get fewer colds. Most colds get better in five to seven days but can take up to two weeks.

How to treat colds

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of water.
- Ask your pharmacist or health visitor about using saline nose drops to help loosen dried snot and relieve a stuffy nose.
- If your child has a fever, pain or discomfort, children's paracetamol or ibuprofen can help. Children with asthma should not take ibuprofen so check with your pharmacist or health visitor first. Always follow the instructions on the packet.
- Encourage the whole family to wash their hands regularly to stop germs spreading.

Coughs

Children often cough when they have a cold. It is often caused by a virus and will improve on its own but it may take up to a week. Although it is upsetting to hear your child cough, this is important to help clear the mucus which is trickling down the back of their throat. If your child is feeding, drinking, eating and breathing normally without wheezing then a cough isn't usually anything to worry about.

Contact your GP practice or call NHS 111 for further advice if:

- the cold worsens or lasts longer than three weeks
- your child is hot and shivery or finding it difficult to breathe
- your child has a high temperature of 38°C or above.

Croup

A child with croup has a distinctive barking cough and will make a harsh sound, known as stridor, when they breathe in. They may also have a runny nose, sore throat and high temperature of 38°C or above.

Croup can usually be diagnosed by your GP and treated at home.

Constipation

Constipation is common in babies and children. You can usually treat it at home with simple changes to your child's diet. It should improve within a few days but sometimes it can take a few weeks.

It's likely to be constipation if:

- your child hasn't had a poo at least three times in a week
- the poo is often difficult to push out and larger than usual
- the poo is often dry, hard or lumpy.

Things to look out for in children include:

- a lack of energy
- being irritable, angry or unhappy
- soiling their clothes.

How to treat constipation

Simple changes to your child's diet or to their potty training routine can help treat constipation. You can also try gently moving your baby's legs in a cycling motion or carefully massaging their tummy to help.

What causes constipation?

Sometimes there is no obvious reason and constipation in babies and toddlers can have many possible causes.

It usually happens when your child:

- first starts having formula or processed foods as a baby
- is being potty trained as a toddler
- has just started school.

The most common causes include:

- not eating enough fibre – such as fruit, vegetables and cereals
- not drinking enough fluids
- overfeeding – including giving babies too much milk
- fear or anxiety about using the toilet – at home or at school
- poor potty training – such as feeling pressured or being regularly interrupted.

Make sure they eat plenty of fruit and veg

Making changes to your child's diet

Give your baby extra water between their normal feeds if they haven't started to eat solid food yet. If you're using formula milk, don't add more water to the mixture.

Give older children plenty of fluids and encourage them to eat fruit. Chop or purée it if it's easier for them to eat. The best fruits for constipation include apples, grapes, pears and strawberries.

Do not force your child to eat as this can make mealtimes stressful.

Helping your child with potty training

Some children feel anxious or stressed about using the toilet. This can cause them to hold in their poo and lead to constipation. This usually happens during potty training or if their usual toilet routine has changed, for example, after moving house or starting nursery.

Give your child plenty of time to use the toilet while they are still learning. Encourage them when they do use the toilet.

In much rarer cases, constipation in babies and children can be caused by a medical condition. If the problem doesn't go away or your child is unwell, has abdominal pains or starts being sick, please contact your GP practice or call NHS 111 for further advice.

Ear infections

Ear infections are common in babies and small children. They often follow a cold and sometimes cause a high temperature. A baby or toddler may pull or rub at an ear. Other possible symptoms are a cough, a fever, irritability, crying, difficulty feeding and restlessness at night.

How to treat ear infections

Most ear infections last up to three days and are caused by viruses which cannot be treated with antibiotics. If your child has earache, with or without a fever, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen at the recommended dose but do not give ibuprofen to a child with asthma. Do not put any oil, eardrops or cotton buds into your child's ear unless your GP tells you to do so.

After an ear infection, your child may have some hearing loss but this should get better within a few weeks. If the problem lasts for any longer than this, ask your GP for advice.

Fever

A fever is a high temperature of 38°C or above. Fever is the body's natural response to fighting infections like coughs and colds. A normal temperature in babies and children is about 36.4°C but this can vary slightly from child to child.

Children often develop a high temperature for a few days when they have an infection. A high temperature may be caused by common childhood illnesses like a cold, sore throat or an infection such as chickenpox. Your child could also develop a fever when they have their vaccinations.

Checking a high temperature

Your child might:

- feel hotter than usual to the touch on their forehead, back or tummy
- feel sweaty or clammy
- have red cheeks.

Use a digital thermometer (which you can buy from pharmacies and supermarkets) to take your child's temperature.

How to treat a high temperature

You can usually look after your child or baby at home and their temperature should go down over three or four days.

Do

- ✓ give them plenty of fluids
- ✓ look out for signs of dehydration
- ✓ give them food if they want it
- ✓ check on your child regularly during the night
- ✓ keep them at home
- ✓ give them paracetamol or ibuprofen if they're distressed or unwell.

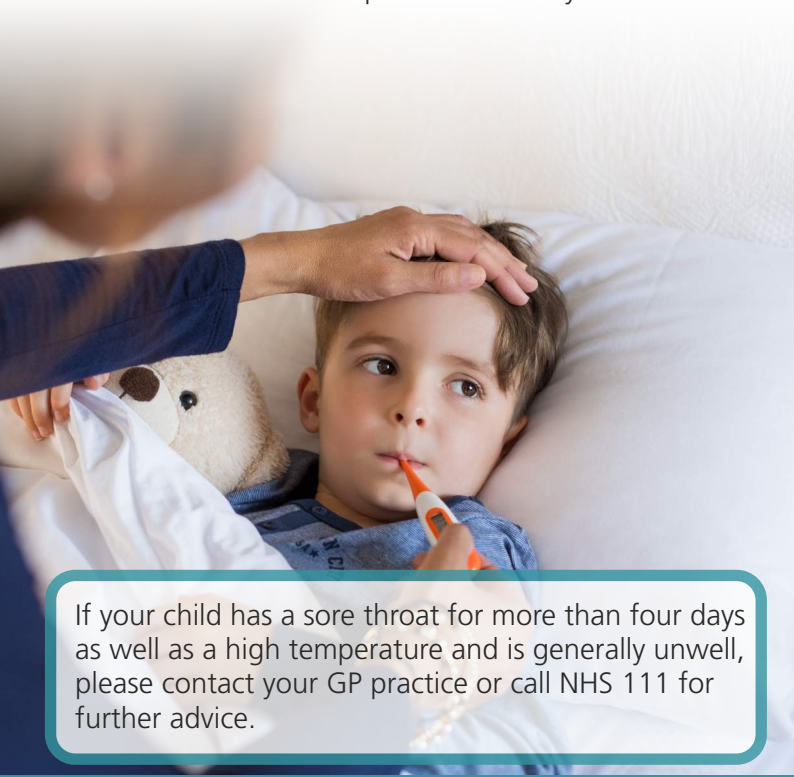
Do not

- × sponge them down to cool them off
- × cover them up in too many clothes or bedclothes
- × give aspirin to under 16s
- × give paracetamol to a child under two months
- × give ibuprofen to a child under three months or if their weight is under 5kg
- × give ibuprofen to a child with asthma
- × routinely combine ibuprofen and paracetamol, unless a health professional tells you to
- × give ibuprofen to a child with chicken pox.

In rarer cases a high temperature is caused by a more serious infection. Please contact your GP practice or call NHS 111 for further advice if your child's temperature does not return to normal or they are drowsy, floppy or refuse to drink; have developed a rash; or you have other concerns.

Sore throats

Sore throats are often caused by a viral illness such as a cold. Your child's throat may be dry and sore for a day or two before a cold starts. You can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen to reduce the pain. Most sore throats will clear up after a few days.



If your child has a sore throat for more than four days as well as a high temperature and is generally unwell, please contact your GP practice or call NHS 111 for further advice.

Upset tummy

Sickness and diarrhoea are common in babies and children. Your child may have them together or on their own. They are usually caused by a stomach bug and can spread easily.

Children are most likely to pass on the stomach bug to others from when the symptoms start until two days after they've stopped. It is important that you keep them at home until the symptoms have stopped for two days.

How long will it last?

- diarrhoea usually lasts five to seven days
- vomiting usually lasts one to two days.

How to treat sickness and diarrhoea

You can usually treat your child at home. The most important thing is to give your child plenty of water to avoid dehydration. If they feel sick encourage them to take small sips.

Do

Make sure your child drinks plenty of water

- ✓ keep your child at home to rest
- ✓ give your child plenty of fluids, such as water or squash
- ✓ carry on feeding your baby as normal and try giving small feeds more often than usual if they're being sick
- ✓ give small sips of water between feeds for babies on formula or solid foods
- ✓ let them eat when they feel able to – you don't need to have or avoid any specific foods.

Do not

- × give your child fruit juice or fizzy drinks as they can make diarrhoea worse
- × make baby formula weaker – use it at its usual strength
- × give young children medicine to stop diarrhoea
- × give aspirin to under 16s.

To avoid it spreading to other adults or children

Do

- ✓ wash your hands and your child's hands with soap and water frequently
- ✓ wash dirty clothes and bedding separately on a hot wash
- ✓ clean toilet seats, handles, taps, surfaces and door handles every day
- ✓ keep your child away from others until symptoms have stopped for two days.

Do not

- × share towels, flannels, cutlery or utensils
- × go swimming for two weeks.

In rarer cases, sickness and diarrhoea is caused by a more serious problem. Please contact your GP practice or call NHS 111 for further advice if the problem doesn't go away or your child is refusing to drink; has abdominal pains; isn't weeing or has blood in their sick or poo.

Choosing the right place to go for help

Pharmacy

Your local pharmacist can give you expert advice on common illnesses and the best medicine to help your child. Many pharmacies are open until late and at weekends. You don't need an appointment – you can just walk in.

NHS111

NHS 111 can help if your child has an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours-a-day and calls are free from a landline or mobile phone. It can provide you with an out-of-hours GP appointment or call an ambulance if necessary.

GP Practice

If you feel that your child's illness cannot be treated at home or their symptoms do not improve, your GP practice will give you an appointment with a doctor or nurse. You will find your GP practice's opening times and phone numbers on their website.

A&E

Accident and Emergency (A&E) and 999 are for life-threatening emergencies.

Requesting a leaflet in a different format

This leaflet can be made available in other formats such as large print, Braille or other languages, please email: communications@bradford.nhs.uk

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The latest information can be found on the NHS website at **www.nhs.uk**