

# The National Children's Hospital, Tallaght



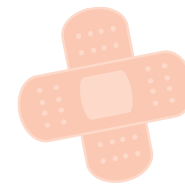
Guide to Childhood Accidents,  
Emergencies & Illnesses

## INTRODUCTION

A part of parenting, or indeed professional child minding, is dealing with babies and children getting sick or having accidents. There can be a fine line between recognising when a child is seriously ill in need of medical attention, versus a mild illness or injury which could be easily treated at home.

The National Children's Hospital, Tallaght, developed this leaflet to give an overview of some everyday childhood accidents, illnesses and emergencies which parents may encounter, and when these may warrant more serious medical attention. Ultimately, if you are very worried about your child's health then do contact your nearest health professional.

I hope you find this leaflet helpful!



## SECTION A:

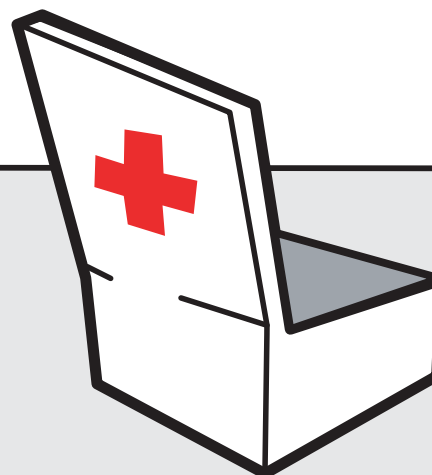
# Common Childhood Accidents & Emergencies

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## SECTION A:

# Common Childhood Accidents & Emergencies

## I. CUTS, GRAZES, INJURED LIMBS AND BLEEDING

### Head and face injury

Bumps on the head are common in young children and may result in an impressive bruise, but are generally not serious.

If your child has had a severe blow to the head, he or she may suffer from concussion, though this may not be apparent for several hours.

Call for emergency help immediately if your child has injured his/her head and/or shows any signs or unusual behaviour or has had any of the following symptoms up to 24 hours later:

- Unconsciousness however brief
- Vomiting
- Noisy breathing or snoring
- Difficulty in walking or drowsiness
- Unusual crying
- Severe headache
- Dislike of bright lights
- Discharge of clear or blood stained fluid from his/her nose or ear



### Fingers and toes

If your child has injured his/her fingers in a door or window or dropped something heavy on their foot, hold the injured area under cold running water for a few minutes. If it is very swollen, or is still painful after about half an hour, take your child to hospital.

In the event of a burn or an injury to a finger or toe, use a paracetamol based pain relief product to help your child manage their pain.

### Bleeding

If blood spurts from a wound, or bleeding continues for more than a few minutes, try to stop the flow so that the blood has a chance to clot.

#### What to do

- Raise the injured part above the level of your child's heart to reduce the amount of blood flowing through it.
- Place a pad of clean non-fluffy material over the wound – then press hard for about ten minutes. If there is no clean material, press with your fingers, drawing the edges of the cut firmly together.
- Leaving the original pad in place, bind a clean pad or dressing firmly over the wound so that the pressure is maintained. If this becomes soaked with blood, don't remove it, just bandage another pad over it, maintaining the pressure all the time.
- If your child is pale or clammy they may be shocked and need medical help.

#### Emergency

- Get your child to hospital as soon as you have given first aid if he/she has been bleeding heavily.

## II. BURNS AND SCALDS

A small superficial burn which causes reddening over an area of about 2 – 3cms (roughly the size of a €2 coin) is a minor burn and can be safely treated at home. A burn that affects an area greater than this is a major burn.

### Minor burns – what to do?

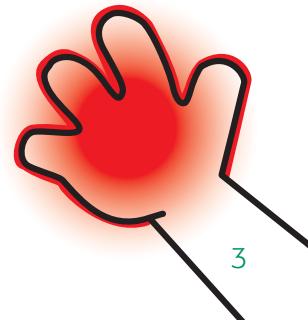
Cool the burn immediately by holding it under cold, slowly running water until the pain decreases. This will help prevent blisters developing.

If a blister develops, put a pad of clean, non-fluffy material over it and hold it in place with sticking plaster or surgical tape.

#### Emergency

Get your child to hospital as soon as you have given first aid if:

- The burn covers an area of more than 2 – 3cm.
- The burn was caused by an electric shock.



### III. SWALLOWING SOMETHING HARMFUL

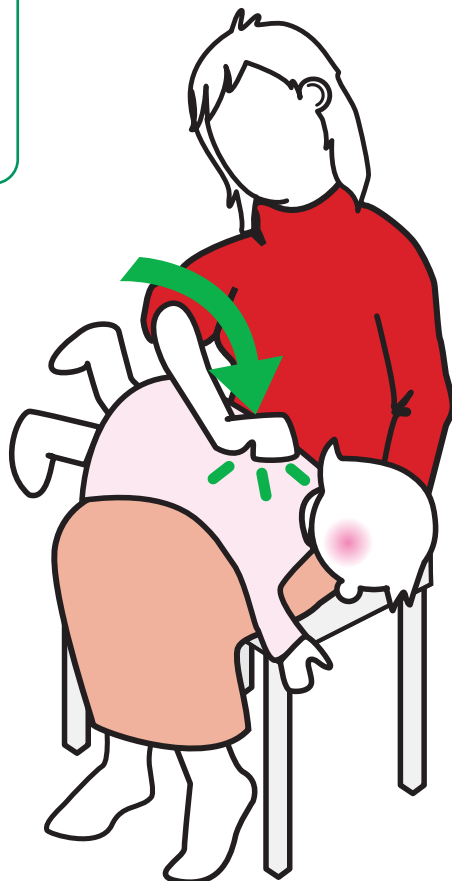
#### Choking

This happens when a small object or piece of food gets lodged in the windpipe, causing a coughing fit. It is important to dislodge the object quickly so that your child can breathe properly again. Choking is very common in young children who tend to put everything they get hold of into their mouths but it's important to act immediately.

**Do not put your fingers into your child's mouth, if you cannot see the object you may push the object further in.**

Call for emergency help if:

- Your child stops breathing.
- You cannot remove the object.
- Your child continues to choke after you have removed the object.



#### Poisoning

Babies and young children tend to be curious, so it is vital to keep poisonous substances locked up and out of reach. Poisoning is one of the most common emergencies in young children.

#### Symptoms

- Your child's symptoms will depend on the type of poison swallowed.

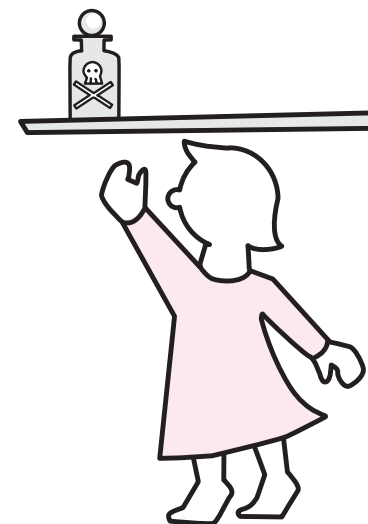
You may notice any of these signs:

- Stomach cramps
- Vomiting
- Symptoms of shock
- Convulsions
- Drowsiness
- Unconsciousness
- Poison or empty container nearby
- Burns or discolouration around the mouth if your child has swallowed a poisonous substance



#### What to do

- If the skin comes in contact with a poisonous substance, rinse skin and eyes for at least 15 minutes with cold running water.
- If your child is unconscious check his/her breathing and call an ambulance.
- Then Contact the **Poisons Information Centre (01 8092566 or 01 8092568)** or a doctor.
- Try to find out what your child has taken and how long ago. Inform your GP or ambulance staff and if possible give them a sample of the container.
- If your child vomits, keep a sample of the vomit to give to the ambulance staff.



## Section B:

# Common Childhood Illnesses

## I. VOMITING, DIARRHOEA, FEVER (HIGH TEMPERATURE) AND CONVULSIONS

### *Vomiting & Diarrhoea*

Babies and young children usually vomit from time to time or have diarrhoea. Once vomiting stops give your child a 'flat' clear soft drink (do not use sugar-free drinks) or rehydration sachets available from your local pharmacy.

However, if your child has had diarrhoea or vomiting for more than six hours, shows any signs of dehydration (i.e. no or fewer wet nappies, dry mouth, no tears, child very sleepy, pallor), drowsiness or if vomit is green or if stools (faeces) contain blood, then bring them to your doctor.

### *Febrile convulsions*

A rapid rise in temperature can cause a convulsion in children, making them lose consciousness and then go rigid for a few seconds before twitching uncontrollably.

You should put your child on the floor and stay with him or her, but do not try to restrain them. Call your doctor as soon as possible.

### *Taking a temperature*

If you suspect your child has a fever, it's important to get an accurate reading of their temperature. A useful tip is to always have a thermometer in the house which is available in most high-street pharmacies.



## II. RASHES

Many newborn babies develop spotty skin, this is usually within the first weeks of life and is normal. If you are worried or if your child is unwell with the rash, bring them to a doctor.

### *Call your doctor if*

- The spots are flat and dark red or purplish.
- If a spot has developed a pus filled centre.
- If you think the spot has become infected.

Other conditions that cause rashes in children include chicken pox, measles, German measles (rubella) & meningitis.

### *Meningitis*

Meningitis is a very serious condition and must be treated without delay.

### *Symptoms include:*

- Fever.
- Drowsiness or sudden dramatic and uncharacteristic irritability or restlessness.
- Change for the worse in a child who has recently had an infectious illness such as measles or mumps.
- Loss of appetite.
- Headache or in babies a slightly bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the crown of a baby's head).
- Reluctance to bend the neck forward.
- Screwing the eyes up or turning the head away from bright light.
- Convulsions.
- A rash of flat, dark red or purple blood spots.



### *Emergency*

Call the doctor immediately if you think your child has meningitis. The doctor may send your child to hospital for tests. Your child's treatment will depend on the results of the tests and he may need to stay in hospital until he/she has recovered.

### III. COUGHS, COLDS, FLU AND WHEEZING

#### *Coughs and colds*

All children catch coughs, colds and flu from time to time – it's all part of growing up. Although these illnesses can't be cured with antibiotics, over-the-counter medicines from pharmacies can ease the symptoms.

#### *Flu*

Influenza, or flu for short, is similar to a cold but the symptoms are more severe. Depending on the extent of the symptoms which include runny nose, sore throat and a cough, flu can bring on a fever, headaches, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and tiredness. Your child might also feel cold and shivery one minute but hot and sticky the next.

**The symptoms of flu are similar to other more serious conditions. If you are concerned about your child's flu symptoms contact your doctor.**

#### *Call the doctor if*

Your child starts to wheeze when coughing. This can be a sign of something more serious such as croup, asthma, bronchitis or laryngitis. If the cough lasts for more than three days and/or your child seems breathless, particularly irritable or has a fever.

#### *Sinusitis*

If a cold lasts longer than a week and is followed by a persistent snotty nose, it may indicate sinusitis. A congested feeling or pain in the cheeks or forehead is common. Some children will develop a fever. Their back teeth might also hurt. Contact your GP who will prescribe antibiotics to clear the infection.

#### *Urinary tract infections*

Symptoms include tummy pain, fever, loss of appetite, pain or burning when the child is having a wee. You should contact your GP who may want to take a sample. Give your child plenty of fluids to flush out the system. Remember, if your child is prone to bladder or kidney infections they should wear cotton underwear, don't use perfumed bubble bath and always wipe bottoms from front to back.

#### *Earache*

Earaches can be very painful and if treated quickly should clear up without causing any problems. You should contact your GP if your child is in a lot of pain, has a temperature of over 38°C, has pink or red swelling behind the ear and/or a stiff neck.

#### *Assessing the level of pain in babies and children*

##### 1. Recognising the signs

Crying is one of the ways your child will let you know that something's not right, especially if they are too young to tell you about their aches and pains. There may be other visible signs such as a cut, bruise or bump. But if their discomfort is due to an illness, the cause of their distress may be less obvious.

Look out for changes in their behaviour including:

- Becoming irritable and overtired.
- Loss of appetite.
- Restlessness during the night.
- They might become withdrawn and quieter than normal.

Finally, in the event of your child becoming suddenly ill or having an accident, regardless of whether it warrants a hospital visit or not, remain calm, it will help your child through the ordeal!





# Emergency Numbers

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The Fundraising Department of The National Children's Hospital welcomes your support and can be contacted at:

The Fundraising Department  
The National Children's Hospital, Tallaght  
Tallaght, Dublin 24.

Phone: 01 414 2373  
Email: [info@thenationalchildrenshospital.ie](mailto:info@thenationalchildrenshospital.ie)  
Web: [www.thenationalchildrenshospital.ie](http://www.thenationalchildrenshospital.ie)

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