

# What to do if your child is unwell

## Febrile neutropenia

### Neutropenia

White blood cells are responsible for fighting infections.

There are several types of white blood cell but neutrophils are particularly important as they fight infections caused by bacteria.

Neutropenia is the term used to describe a low neutrophil count. When your child's neutrophil count falls to  $0.5 \times 10^9/L$  or below they are said to be neutropenic. When neutropenic your child will be more susceptible to developing infections. It is therefore important that if they become unwell or develop a temperature you contact your local hospital immediately so that they can be seen and given antibiotic treatment if appropriate.

### Temperatures

The risk of infection varies depending on the type of treatment your child is having, how much the blood count is suppressed, and the length of time it is suppressed.

A raised temperature is often the first sign of infection. When your child is neutropenic and develops a temperature this is known as febrile neutropenia. If your child seems unwell or feels hot take their temperature with a digital thermometer. A normal temperature is between  $36^{\circ}C$  and  $37^{\circ}C$ . Do not give your child paracetamol unless advised to do so.

If their temperature is  **$38^{\circ}C$  or above** you will need to take your child to your local hospital for IV antibiotics. Please do not delay going to hospital as this may put your child at risk.

When children have high temperatures they may become clammy, sweaty and shivery.

If you are concerned about your child or your child is drowsy or has symptoms of diarrhoea or vomiting please call your local hospital for advice, as sometimes children can become unwell and develop infections without having a temperature.

Medicines that lower the temperature (e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen) should not routinely be given to your child at home whilst they are on active treatment as this may mask a fever.

If your child is likely to need some form of pain killer at home then they may be prescribed oral morphine medicine in case needed. Once a decision has been made that your child needs admission to hospital for antibiotics, then they may be given paracetamol regularly whilst in hospital.

On occasion, you may be given specific medical advice to give paracetamol at home. If this is the case you **will** need to check their temperature before each dose and call for advice if it is at all high.

## Hospital admission

If your child is unwell they will be admitted to their local shared care hospital for treatment. The local paediatric team will liaise closely with the paediatric oncology team in Southampton during their admission and it may occasionally be considered necessary to transfer your child to Southampton for further treatment. The beds on Piam Brown ward are prioritised for children receiving chemotherapy, as this cannot be given on other wards. Therefore children who require admission to hospital for other reasons, such as infection, may be admitted to any of the paediatric wards in Southampton. Children who are admitted to other wards will be reviewed by the paediatric oncology medical team each day as part of the Piam Brown ward round.