

Febrile Convulsion (Seizure)



What is a febrile convulsion?

A febrile convulsion is a seizure, or a fit, that can happen when a child has a high temperature, usually over 39°C. Although they can be frightening, febrile convulsions are not usually serious and do not indicate a serious health problem. Most children make a full recovery. About 5 in every 100 children will have a febrile convulsion before they are 6 years old (www.hse.ie). In this guide we give you general overview of febrile convulsion and what you can do as a parent, guardian or carer in the event of this happening.

Febrile convulsions are most likely to affect children aged six months to five years. Any illness that can cause a fever in a child can cause a febrile convulsion. They happen with simple infections like colds, ear infections, chickenpox or tonsillitis. Seizures can also happen post-immunization following some childhood vaccinations where a fever develops. It is the fever, not the vaccination that causes the seizure. Febrile convulsions usually happen in the first 24 hours of an illness.

How would you recognise a Febrile Convulsion:

- The Child will lose consciousness and may wet or soil themselves
- Their body, legs and arms will go stiff
- Their legs and arms start to jerk
- Their head may be thrown back and their eyes may roll back
- The child will foam at the mouth or vomit
- Their skin may be pale or even appear blue (cyanosis)
- Convulsions may last for a few minutes and then gradually subside
- The child will be limp at first and then normal color and consciousness will return

Treatment of a Febrile Convulsion:

- A febrile convulsion is treated the same as seizure

- Check the time that the convulsion starts and finishes and make a note of how long it lasted.
- Let the convulsion run its course, whilst protecting the child from injury or harm
- Do not shake the child or try to restrain them
- Do not attempt to put anything in their mouth
- Place the child in the recovery position. This keeps their airway clear and ensures that they will not swallow any vomit
- After the febrile seizure your child may be sleepy for up to an hour. Offer your child comfort at this time
- You can help to lower a child's temperature by removing excess clothing or bed clothing and opening windows
- It is not recommended to sponge the child's skin with cold water as this may lower the temperature too quickly
- Most seizures will stop after a few minutes and do not require treatment. However, take your child to the doctor or the emergency department at the hospital for a check-up afterwards because the high temperature which caused the seizure may need treatment
- A **straightforward febrile seizure** like this will usually only happen once during your child's illness
- Occasionally, febrile seizures can last longer than 15 minutes and only one area of the child's body may show symptoms. These are known as **complex febrile seizure** and can recur within 24 hours or during your child's illness period

Call 999 or 112 and ask for an ambulance if:

- The seizure is prolonged (more than 5 minutes)
- Your child suffers repeated seizures
- The child is having difficulty breathing
- You feel the cause for the convulsion is from another serious illness, such as meningitis

Recurring febrile seizures

About 1 in 3 children who have a febrile seizure will have a subsequent seizure

during another infection. Recurrence is more likely if:

- There is a history of epilepsy or seizures in your family
- The first febrile seizure occurred before your child was 18 months old
- When the first febrile seizure happened, your child had a temperature lower than 40°C
- Your child had a complex febrile seizure (more than one seizure) during their last illness

About us

Donegal Safety Services provide a number of first aid training courses, our **Paediatric First Aid** course covers common paediatric conditions such as febrile convulsions, and is ideal for individuals who work with children.

If you have any questions at all regarding any of our courses we would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact us by visiting our contact us page or by emailing us directly on info@donegalsafety.com

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Hope you enjoyed this article on febrile convulsions.