



## FEVER AND PREGNANCY

*Information in this leaflet is general in nature and should not take the place of advice from your health care provider. With every pregnancy there is a 3 to 5% risk of having a baby with a birth defect or developmental problem.*

### **What is fever?**

Fever is a body temperature exceeding 38.3°C. The average normal oral body temperature is defined as 36-37°C but it fluctuates according to the time of day by 0.5-1.0 °C with the lowest temperature being in the early morning and the highest in the evening. The average normal body temperature taken in mid morning is 36.7°C<sup>1</sup>.

### **What causes a fever**

Most fevers are a response to common infections.

### **Why treat a fever?**

Sustained fever of **greater than 38.9°C** for at least 24 hours has been shown to be associated with an increased risk of miscarriage and malformations including neural tube defects like spina bifida in early pregnancy<sup>2</sup> and stillbirth in later pregnancy.

### **Recommendations for Treatment.**

The safest option for fever control in pregnancy is **paracetamol**.

The recommended dose is 1g (= 2 x 500mg tablets) up to four times a day (total daily dose of 4g/day)

Taking paracetamol at the recommended doses has not been shown to increase the risk for pregnancy loss or birth defects.

### **Non Drug Treatment.**

- Ensure adequate fluids
- Rest may also help you to fight the infection causing the fever and help you feel better

You should contact your health professional if you have a prolonged fever. It is important to know what may have caused it.

Body temperature may also be raised by hot tubs, saunas, electric blankets and sustained exercise. Unless you have prolonged exposure at extremely high temperatures it is unlikely that your core body temperature would be raised sufficiently to cause problems.

### **References:**

1. From *2007 Current Consult: Medicine* by Maxine A. Papadakis and Stephen J. McPhee
2. Chambers CD et al. Maternal fever and birth outcomes: A prospective study. *Teratology* 1998; 58: 251-57

### **Additional Information:**

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/>

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*For more information call MotherSafe: NSW Medications in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Service on 9382 6539 (Sydney Metropolitan Area) or 1800 647 848 (Non-Metropolitan Area) Monday -Friday 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays)*