Assessment and initial management

Flowchart for child < 5 years old with fever (>38°C axillary)

- Needs resuscitation?
  - Yes
  - Age < 3 months? (corrected for gestation)
    - Yes
    - Any sign of toxicity?
      - Yes
      - Focus of infection?
        - Yes
        - Urinalysis.
          - If positive, culture urine and commence antibiotics.
          - If negative, review / consult next day if still febrile.
        - No
      - No
        - Investigate focus as appropriate and treat
      - No
    - No
    - Investigate (FBC, B/C, Urine, ?CSF, ?CXR)
      - IV antibiotics
  - No
    - Investigate (FBC, B/C, Urine, ?CSF, ?CXR)
      - Admit / transfer, senior review / consult early.

- Toxicity
  - One or more of:
    - Alertness arousal or activity decreased
    - Breathing difficulties (tachypnoea, increased work of breathing)
    - Colour (pale or mottled), circulation (cool peripheries), or cry (weak, high pitched)
    - Decreased fluid intake or decreased urine output

- Unimmunised children are at increased risk of serious bacterial infection

- Axillary measurement of temperature is preferred in the 0-5 years age group.

- Oral and rectal measurements are not recommended because of safety concerns.

- Tympanic measurements may be inaccurate.

- When in doubt, ask for advice. No febrile child should be discharged from an Emergency Department without senior advice, particularly a child referred by a general practitioner, or a child representing with a febrile illness.

- At discharge the parent(s) should be educated on the detection and significance of toxicity, arrangements made for review, and a Fever Fact sheet and discharge summary provided.

- Err on the side of caution. If you are worried, admit / transfer the child.

- Only do a procedure or a test if it is going to contribute to a clinical decision. Use the flowchart to work out what tests you need. If in doubt about a child’s clinical condition consult with someone more experienced such as a paediatric specialist. If a specialist is not available, call NETS (the Newborn and paediatric Emergency Transport Service) on 1300 36 2500.