

Table 1 Traffic light system for identifying likelihood of serious illness

	Green – low risk	Amber – intermediate risk	Red – high risk
Colour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal colour of skin, lips and tongue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pallor reported by parent/carer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pale/mottled/ashen/blue
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds normally to social cues • Content/smiles • Stays awake or awakens quickly • Strong normal cry/ not crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not responding normally to social cues • Wakes only with prolonged stimulation • Decreased activity • No smile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response to social cues • Appears ill to a healthcare professional • Unable to rouse or if roused does not stay awake • Weak, high-pitched or continuous cry
Respiratory		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasal flaring • Tachypnoea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RR > 50 breaths/minute age 6–12 months – RR > 40 breaths/minute age > 12 months • Oxygen saturation \leq 95% in air • Crackles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grunting • Tachypnoea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RR > 60 breaths/minute • Moderate or severe chest indrawing
Hydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal skin and eyes • Moist mucous membranes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry mucous membrane • Poor feeding in infants • CRT \geq 3 seconds • Reduced urine output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced skin turgor
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None of the amber or red symptoms or signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever for \geq 5 days • Swelling of a limb or joint • Non-weight bearing/ not using an extremity • A new lump > 2 cm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age 0–3 months, temperature \geq 38°C • Age 3–6 months, temperature \geq 39°C • Non-blanching rash • Bulging fontanelle • Neck stiffness • Status epilepticus • Focal neurological signs • Focal seizures • Bile-stained vomiting

CRT: capillary refill time

RR: respiratory rate

Table 2 Symptoms and signs of specific diseases

Diagnosis to be considered	Symptoms and signs in conjunction with fever
Meningococcal disease	Non-blanching rash, particularly with one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an ill-looking child • lesions larger than 2 mm in diameter (purpura) • CRT \geq 3 seconds • neck stiffness
Meningitis ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neck stiffness • Bulging fontanelle • Decreased level of consciousness • Convulsive status epilepticus
Herpes simplex encephalitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal neurological signs • Focal seizures • Decreased level of consciousness
Pneumonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tachypnoea, measured as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 0–5 months – RR > 60 breaths/minute – 6–12 months – RR > 50 breaths/minute – > 12 months – RR > 40 breaths/minute • Crackles in the chest • Nasal flaring • Chest indrawing • Cyanosis • Oxygen saturation \leq 95%
Urinary tract infection (in children aged older than 3 months) ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomiting • Poor feeding • Lethargy • Irritability • Abdominal pain or tenderness • Urinary frequency or dysuria • Offensive urine or haematuria
Septic arthritis/osteomyelitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling of a limb or joint • Not using an extremity • Non-weight bearing
Kawasaki disease ³	Fever lasting longer than 5 days and at least four of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bilateral conjunctival injection • change in upper respiratory tract mucous membranes (for example, injected pharynx, dry cracked lips or strawberry tongue) • change in the peripheral extremities (for example, oedema, erythema or desquamation) • polymorphous rash • cervical lymphadenopathy

CRT: capillary refill time
RR: respiratory rate

¹ Classical signs (neck stiffness, bulging fontanelle, high-pitched cry) are often absent in infants with bacterial meningitis.

² Urinary tract infection should be considered in any child aged younger than 3 months with fever. See 'Urinary tract infection in children' (NICE clinical guideline, publication expected August 2007).

³ Note: in rare cases, incomplete/atypical Kawasaki disease may be diagnosed with fewer features.