

# Coma in a child

## URGENT:

Establish/protect airway (place into recovery position if unprotected and intubation not possible)  
 Consider intubation and ventilation if P or U on AVPU scale  
 Support with bag-valve-mask if inadequate breathing or absent cough or gag reflex

Assess and stabilise  
**ABC**

Give high  
concentration **O<sub>2</sub>**

Establish **IV** access  
Treat **shock** if  
present

**Glucose stick test,**  
blood cultures, U&E  
and FBC if possible

Treat hypoglycaemia  
5ml/kg 10% **Glucose IV / IO**

YES  
NO  
**< 1.6  
mmol/l?**

Rapid assessment  
of conscious level  
**AVPU** and pupils

**Alert or  
responds to  
Voice**

Identification and immediate  
**treatment of the  
treatable** e.g. meningitis, malaria

**Reassess**

Signs of  
raised ICP?

YES

**Raised ICP  
management**

NO

Diagnostic pointers to cause:  
Recent trauma: head injury  
Fontanelle, neck stiffness/  
photophobia  
High fever: meningitis, malaria  
Ingestion of drugs/poisons  
Skin rash: meningococcus



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## Key Points in Management

- Monitor vital signs regularly
  - Maintain normal blood glucose
  - Avoid hyponatraemia  
– do not give hypotonic solutions
  - Treat seizures
  - NG tube and frequent small feeds
  - Avoid hyperthermia (T >37.5)  
– give rectal paracetamol
  - Urinary catheter to monitor status of circulation
- Consider need for lumbar puncture when conscious level improves

## Drug doses

### Meningitis:

- Cefotaxime 100mg/kg
- (WHO benzylpenicillin + chloramphenicol)
- Dexamethasone 150 mcg/kg 6 hrly

### Malaria:

- Quinine 20mg/kg in 20ml/kg 5%
- (WHO 20mg/kg in 10ml/kg of 5% dextrose) glucose over 4-6 hours

responds to  
**Pain or  
Unresponsive**

Establish/protect **airway** as  
above

## Raised ICP signs and management

### Signs:

- Unconscious
- Decerebrate/decorticate posture
- Dolls eye movements

### Management:

- Maximise oxygenation and circulation
- Minimise disturbance
- Control fits (see convulsions pathway)
- Mannitol 250-500 micrograms/kg over 15 minutes
- Nurse head up at 30 degrees