



How to Take a Temperature Correctly

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains some general guidelines for taking your child's temperature. Your child's doctor or nurse can give you specific instructions as needed for your child.

What is a normal temperature for my child?

A child's temperature (temp) varies during the day. It is lower in the morning and higher in the evening. It may vary some based on the method you use to take your child's temp, your child's age and condition and the time of day. If you call your child's doctor, be sure to say which method you used.

What is a fever?

A fever is when the body's temp is higher than normal.

Place for taking your child's temp	Approximate normal temp range	Fever range	Special note
Rectal (in the bottom)	97°F to 100.3°F	Over 100.3°F	If your baby is younger than 24 months old, take his temp this way.
Oral (by mouth)	97°F to 100°F	Over 100.3°F	Drinking hot or cold liquids just before taking an oral temp can change the reading. Make sure your child does not have anything hot or cold to drink for 20 - 30 minutes before taking his temp.
Axillary (under the arm)	97°F to 100°F	Over 100.3°F	This is the least accurate way to take your child's temp.

- Take your child's temperature the same way every time.
- A thermometer used in the bottom should not be used in the mouth.
- Clean and store thermometers as the directions on the package tell you.

NOTE for taking your baby's temp at home: If your baby is younger than 24 months old, take his temp rectally. Other methods are not as accurate in young babies. An accurate temp on young babies is very important, especially when a doctor has not seen the baby for the illness yet.

What if my child has a chronic health problem?

Check with your child's doctor about when to call for a fever if your child:

- Sees a doctor or specialist for a medical condition on a regular basis.
- Has had urinary tract infections (UTI) in the past.
- Has a problem with the immune system or is receiving treatment for cancer. Many times doctors do not want these children to have a rectal temp.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

How to Take a Temperature Correctly, continued

Types of thermometers

The most common types of thermometers are:

- **Digital** – used to take an oral, rectal or axillary temperature. Some come with a plastic cover or sleeve. If so, throw away the cover after each use. Follow the directions on the package to use it.
- **Temporal** - used to take a temperature by scanning the temporal artery in the forehead area. Follow the directions on the package to use it.
- **Tympanic** – used to take a temperature in the ear. This method is not advised. It can give false low readings if your child has a lot of earwax, moves or squirms or if you place it in the ear incorrectly.
- **Glass** – the American Academy of Pediatrics no longer advises using glass thermometers. The glass can break and allow mercury (the silver liquid inside) to spill out. Liquid mercury can produce harmful vapors. If a glass thermometer would break, leave the area and call your local poison center **right away**. The phone number for the Atlanta Poison Center is 404-616-9000 for the metro area and 1-800-222-1222 for outside the metro area.

How to use a digital thermometer in your baby's bottom:

NOTE: Babies who are less than 24 months old should have their temps taken rectally at home.

- Dip the tip of the thermometer in petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline®).
- Lay your baby on his stomach on your lap or a changing table.
- Hold your baby still by placing your hand on his lower back.
- Turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer ½ to 1 inch into the baby's bottom and hold it in place.
- Listen for the signal or beep.
- Remove the thermometer.
- Read it and write the numbers down on paper.

How to use a digital thermometer under the arm:

NOTE: Take a temperature under the arm for babies over 24 months old and toddlers. Keep in mind that this method is not as accurate. If your baby's axillary temp is normal, but you suspect a fever, take a rectal temp.

- Turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer under your child's arm.
- Fold your child's arm down and across the chest to hold it in place.
- Listen for the signal or beep.
- Remove the thermometer.
- Read it and write the numbers down on paper.

How to take a temperature in the mouth:

NOTE: Use this method for older children who will not bite down. Your child should not drink any hot or cold drinks 20-30 minutes before taking a temperature in the mouth.

- Turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer in the mouth and under the tongue. Have your child close his lips around it. Tell your child not to bite down with his teeth.
- Listen for the signal or beep.
- Remove the thermometer.
- Read it and write the numbers down on paper.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

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When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has one or more of the following symptoms:

- He does not smile or play for even a few minutes every four-hours
- He shows signs of dehydration (drying out):
 - No urine in six hours in an infant younger than 12 months old
 - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 12 months old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth
- Vomits more than 2 times.
- He is not comfortable, even when held
- He seems to be breathing hard or fast even after the fever has been treated with medicine.
- He develops a rash
- The fever lasts more than three days
- He complains of any persistent pain such as earache, pain with voiding or stomach pain.
- For a baby less than 2 months old with **any fever** who has not yet been checked by a doctor for the fever.
- For a baby 2-6 months old with a **fever more than 102.2°F (rectally)** who has not yet been checked by a doctor for the fever.
- For a baby 6-24 months old with a **fever more than 103°F (rectally)** who has not yet been checked by a doctor for the fever.
- You have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

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