

Fever and Temperature Taking *Guidelines for Children*

When your child is sick with an infection (caused by either bacteria or a virus), it is common to have a fever. A fever will not hurt your child. Usually, it goes away after 72 hours (3 days).

Babies younger than 6 months old should see a doctor when they have a fever.

Older children can be treated at home, as long as they get enough liquids and seem well otherwise.

However, they should also see a doctor if their fever lasts for more than 48 hours.

There are several ways to take your child's temperature:

- rectal method (by the rectum or 'bum');
- oral method (by the mouth);
- axillary method (under the armpit); and
- tympanic method (in the ear)

The right method depends on your child's age. It's important that the measurement is accurate. For instance, taking a rectal temperature is still the best way to get an exact reading for children under 2 years old. But most children don't like to have their temperature taken this way.

Although taking a temperature under the armpit isn't as precise, it may let you know whether your child has a fever.

The following chart will help you decide which method to use.

Age	Recommended technique	
Birth to 2 years	1 st choice: 2 nd choice:	Rectum (for an accurate reading) Armpit
Between 2 and 5 years	1 st choice: 2 nd choice:	Rectum (for an accurate reading) Ear, armpit
Older than 5 years	1 st choice: 2 nd choice:	Mouth (for an accurate reading) Ear, armpit

Temperature-taking tips

- Do not use a mercury thermometer. If it breaks, you might be exposed to this toxic substance.
- Do not use an oral thermometer to take a rectal temperature, or a rectal thermometer for oral temperature taking.
- A digital thermometer can be used for both rectal and oral temperature taking. It is made of unbreakable plastic, is easy to read and measures temperature quickly.
- Ear thermometers are expensive and can be complicated to use.
- Fever strips are not recommended because they do not give accurate readings.

To get an accurate reading of your child's temperature, you'll need to make sure it's done right. Here's how:

Rectum

- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse.
- Cover the silver tip with petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline).
- Place your baby on his back with his knees bent.
- Gently insert the thermometer in the rectum, about 2.5 cm (1 inch), holding it in place with your fingers.
- After about 1 minute, you will hear the "beep."
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.
- Clean the thermometer.

Mouth

The mouth (oral) method **is not recommended for children younger than 5 years old**, because it is hard for them to hold the thermometer still under their tongue for long enough.

- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse.
- Carefully place the tip of the thermometer under your child's tongue.
- With your child's mouth closed, leave the thermometer in place for about 1 minute, until you hear the "beep."
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.
- Clean the thermometer.

Armpit

The armpit (axillary) method is usually used to check for fever in newborns and young children but is not as accurate as a rectal temperature. If an axillary temperature does not identify a fever but your child feels warm and seems unwell, confirm the temperature with a rectal measurement.

- Use a rectal or oral thermometer.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse.
- Place the tip of the thermometer in the centre of the armpit.
- Make sure your child's arm is tucked snugly against her body.
- Leave the thermometer in place for about 1 minute, until you hear the "beep."
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.
- Clean the thermometer.

Ear

Though quick to use, the ear (tympanic) method can produce temperature readings that are too low, even when manufacturer's directions are followed. It is not considered to be as reliable or accurate as rectal temperature taking.

- Use a clean probe tip each time, and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it back. This will help straighten the ear canal, and make a clear path inside the ear to the ear drum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold down the button for one second.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

What is normal temperature?

Now that you've taken the temperature, check the following chart to see whether your child has a fever. The normal temperature range varies, depending on what method you use.

Measurement method	Normal temperature range
Rectum	36.6°C to 38°C (97.9°F to 100.4°F)
Mouth	35.5°C to 37.5°C (95.9°F to 99.5°F)
Armpit	34.7°C to 37.3°C (94.5°F to 99.1°F)
Ear	35.8°C to 38°C (96.4°F to 100.4°F)

What can I do if my child has a fever?

The degree (or height) of a fever does not tell you how serious your child's illness is. How a child acts is usually a better sign. A child with a mild infection can have a high fever, while a child with a severe infection might have no fever at all.

Keep your child comfortable, and offer plenty of fluids. If your baby has a fever, remove extra blankets and clothing so heat can leave her body and help lower the body temperature. But don't take off all your child's clothes, because she may become too cold and start shivering, which produces more body heat, causing the temperature to rise again. Sponging your child with tepid (lukewarm) water, alcohol baths and rubs are not recommended.

Contact your health care provider if your child:

- Has a fever and is less than 6 months old.
- Has a fever higher than 39°C (102°F).
- Has a fever for more than 48 hours.
- Is excessively cranky, fussy or irritable.
- Is excessively sleepy, lethargic or does

not respond.

- Is persistently wheezing or coughing.
- Has a fever and a rash or any other signs of illness that worry you.

Medication is not always needed to reduce a child's temperature.

In fact, the best reason for giving your child medicine is not to reduce the fever but to relieve any aches and pains.

Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®, Tempra®, Panadol® and others) is the best medication for a fever. Unless your physician says otherwise, parents can give the dose recommended on the package every 4 hours until the child's temperature comes down. The temperature usually comes down in 1.5 to 2 hours and then rises again, in which case the medication may have to be repeated. It is important not to exceed 5 doses in 24 hours.

You can also use ibuprofen, which is found in products such as Advil® and Motrin®. Be sure to follow the directions on the package. Ibuprofen can be given every 6 to 8 hours — up to 4 times in a 24-hour period. Do not exceed the recommended dose. Do not give acetaminophen and ibuprofen at the same time.

A child or teenager with a fever should not be given aspirin [acetylsalicylic acid (ASA)].

If the fever is due to chickenpox, influenza or certain other viral infections, taking aspirin can increase the risk of Reye's syndrome. This is a very serious condition that can damage the liver and brain.

Taken from: Caring for Kids; Canadian Paediatric Society