



## TAKING YOUR CHILD'S TEMPERATURE

### What Kind of Thermometer Should I Use?

A digital thermometer is the quickest, easiest and best way to take your child's temperature. It can be used in the mouth, underarm and rectum. If you plan to use a digital thermometer to take both oral and rectal temperatures, you'll need to get two digital thermometers and label one for oral use and one for rectal use. Digital thermometers are available at most pharmacies. Read the instructions carefully.

### How Do I Use a Digital Thermometer?

Digital thermometers are used just like glass mercury thermometers, but they are much safer and easier to read. If your thermometer uses a disposable plastic sleeve or cover, be sure and put one on before taking your child's temperature. Throw away the cover after using, and clean the thermometer with rubbing alcohol or with cool, soapy water. Digital thermometers have a heat sensor that takes the temperature in less than one minute and displays it in numbers on a small screen.

A normal temperature is about 98.6°F (37°C) when taken orally (in your child's mouth) and 99.6°F (37.5°C) when taken rectally (in your child's bottom). Many doctors define a fever as an oral temperature above 99.5°F (37.5°C) or a rectal temperature above 100.4°F (38°C).

## REFERENCES

[www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)  
[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

Wilson, D., & Hockenberry, M. J. (2012). *Wong's Clinical Manual of Pediatric Nursing, 8th ed.* St. Louis: Mosby/Elsevier.



[www.scdhec.gov/health/childteenhealth](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/childteenhealth)

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# HOW SHOULD I TAKE MY CHILD'S TEMPERATURE?

## Axillary (armpit):

This is the safest way to check and see if your child has fever.

1. Tell your child you are going to measure his temperature.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Place the thermometer under your child's arm with the tip resting on the skin in the center of the armpit. Make sure the armpit is dry.
4. Hold your child's arm firmly against his body.
5. Make sure you continue to hold the thermometer securely.
6. When you hear the beep or other signal remove the thermometer and read the temperature.
7. Write down the temperature reading and time.
8. Praise your child for helping.
9. Clean the thermometer with with rubbing alcohol or with cool, soapy water.
10. Wash your hands.



## Oral (mouth):

When your child is 5-6 years of age she can understand how to safely hold the thermometer in her mouth. If your child has had something to eat or drink, wait at least 15-20 minutes before taking her temperature by mouth.

1. Tell your child why you want to measure her temperature.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Place the thermometer in the mouth, far back under the tongue. Tell your child to close her lips around it, breathe through her nose and not talk.
4. Make sure your child does not bite the thermometer.
5. When you hear the beep or other signal remove the thermometer and read it.



## Rectal (bottom):

Rectal temperatures should only be taken if your child's health care provider tells you to take your child's temperature rectally.

1. Tell your child that you are going to measure his temperature.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Place your child in your lap on his stomach with one or both knees bent or on his back with both legs up.
4. Dip the thermometer's tip in a lubricant such as petroleum jelly (Vaseline™) to help it slide in more easily.
5. Place the end of the thermometer into your child's anal opening (about 1 inch into the rectum). If your child is less than 6 months old, put the end of the thermometer in only about 1/2 inch. **Stop if you feel any resistance.**
6. Hold the thermometer steady.
7. Hold your child so that he cannot wiggle around.
8. When you hear the beep or other signal remove the thermometer and read it.
9. Write down the temperature and time.
10. Praise your child for helping.
11. Clean the thermometer with with rubbing alcohol or with cool, soapy water.
12. Wash your hands.



## ADDITIONAL TIPS:

Never take your child's temperature right after a bath or if she has been wrapped up tightly in blankets for a while — this can cause an incorrect temperature reading. Never leave your child alone while taking her temperature. Some thermometers are for oral/armpit or rectal use only, so be sure you have the right type. Read the package instructions carefully.

*Talk with your child's nurse or doctor if you have any questions about how to take your child's temperature. Find out more about fever in children: [www.scdhec.gov/library/CR-008086.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/library/CR-008086.pdf)*