

# How to Take Body Temperature, Pediatric

Knowing how to take your child's temperature is important because it helps you identify fevers and treat illnesses properly. The normal temperature range for children is 96.8–100.4°F (36–38°C). To find out what temperature is normal for your child, take your child's temperature when he or she is well.

Whenever you take your child's temperature, write it down. Record the date, time, and any symptoms that your child has.

## What are the different kinds of thermometers?

There are several kinds of thermometers. The following are recommended for safe use:

- Digital multi-use thermometer. This can be used in the mouth (*orally*), in the rectum (*rectally*), or under the arm (*axillary*). Always label digital multi-use thermometers. **Do not** use the same digital multi-use thermometer to take your child's temperature in different ways.
- Temporal artery thermometer. This is placed against the forehead. It picks up the heat from the temporal artery, which runs across the forehead.
- Tympanic thermometer. This type is inserted into the ear canal. It records the heat from the eardrum.



**Do not** use the following thermometers.

- Glass mercury thermometers. The glass can break. This is dangerous to your child's health and to the environment.
- Temperature strips. They are not always accurate and are not recommended at this time.
- Pacifier thermometers. They are not as accurate as other types of thermometers.

## General tips

### Type of thermometer to use

- The type of thermometer you should use varies by your child's age. If your child is:
  - 4 years or older, use an oral thermometer.
  - 3 years or younger, use a rectal thermometer.
- If you are not comfortable using an oral or rectal thermometer to take your child's temperature, ask your health care provider if you may use:
  - A temporal artery thermometer, if your child is at least 3 months old.
  - A tympanic thermometer, if your child is older than 6 months. This method will work only if:
    - The thermometer is used exactly as directed.
    - The child does not have too much wax in his or her ear.
- An axillary measurement can be done on a child of any age, but it is the least reliable method. It should only be used as a screening tool.
- Always remember that:
  - Rectal and temporal artery temperatures can be slightly higher.
  - Tympanic and axillary temperatures may be slightly lower.



## General instructions

- Take your child's temperature the same way each time you check it. Different methods may provide different readings. The only way to know whether your child's temperature is increasing or decreasing is to use the same method each time.

## How to take your child's temperature

The steps for taking your child's temperature depend on the method and the type of thermometer that you use. You will get the result in about 1 minute. Always read the instructions that come with the thermometer.

Wash your hands with soap and water before and after taking your child's temperature. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Clean the thermometer with soap and water or rubbing alcohol before and after you use it.

- Use only cool or warm water to wash a thermometer. **Do not** use hot or cold water. Doing this can cause a thermometer to give a wrong reading.

### Rectal

Always label a rectal thermometer clearly so it is never used in the mouth.

1. Wipe a small amount of petroleum jelly on the end.
2. Place your child in one of these positions:
  - On his or her belly, with your hand firmly on the back, just above his or her bottom.
  - On his or her back, with knees folded up toward the chest.
3. Turn on the thermometer.
4. With your free hand, gently insert the thermometer  $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 inch into his or her rectum. **Do not** put it in any farther than that.
5. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
6. Gently take out the thermometer. Read the temperature.
7. Repeat, if needed.

### Oral

Always label an oral thermometer clearly, so that it is used in the mouth only. If your child is unable to close his or her mouth for any reason, **do not** use an oral thermometer.

1. If your child recently ate or drank, wait 15 minutes before taking the temperature orally.
2. Turn on the thermometer.
3. Gently place the thermometer under your child's tongue, toward the back of the mouth.
4. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
5. Gently take out the thermometer. Read the temperature.
6. Repeat, if needed.

### Temporal Artery

1. Turn on the thermometer.
2. Place the flat end of the thermometer firmly on the center of your child's forehead.
3. Press and hold the scan button.
4. Lightly slide the thermometer across your child's forehead until you reach the hairline on one side of the head. While you do this, maintain contact with the skin of the forehead.

5. When the thermometer reaches the hairline, release the scan button and remove the thermometer from your child's head. Read the temperature.
6. Repeat, if needed.

### **Axillary**

1. Turn on the thermometer.
2. Make sure that your child's underarm is dry.
3. Lift your child's arm and place the end of the thermometer against the center of the armpit.
4. Lower your child's arm and hold it firmly closed over the thermometer against his or her side.
5. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
6. Take out the thermometer. Read the temperature.
7. Repeat, if needed.

### **Tympanic**

**Do not** use the tympanic method if your child has ear pain, discharge from the ear, or a lot of earwax.

1. Turn on the thermometer.
2. Place the thermometer gently but securely into the opening of the ear canal.
3. Hold the thermometer in place until it beeps.
4. Gently take out the thermometer. Read the temperature.
5. Repeat, if needed.



### **Summary**

- Knowing how to take your child's temperature is important because it helps you identify fevers and treat illnesses properly.
- Use the appropriate thermometer and method for your child's age and condition. Read instructions that came with the thermometer.
- Whenever you take your child's temperature, record the temperature, time, and symptoms.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.