

Taking Your Child's Temperature (Using a Digital Thermometer)

Why should I take my child's temperature?

Checking a temperature is the best way to tell if your child has a fever. A fever can be a symptom of illness or infection. When you call to report that your child is ill, the doctor will want to know if your child has a fever.



What does a digital thermometer do?

A digital thermometer is very sensitive. It measures and displays your child's temperature. It gets power from a small battery that lasts many years. It can be used to check your child's temperature in 3 ways:

- In the mouth (oral)
- In the bottom (rectal)
- In the armpit (axillary)

How do I use a digital thermometer?

- Wash and dry your hands.
- Take the digital thermometer out of its case. If the thermometer has plastic covers for the probe, put one on.
- Hold the thermometer firmly between your thumb and your first finger.
- Press the On/Off button. You should hear a beep. The beep means the thermometer is working correctly. Some digital thermometers may show the last temperature taken.

How do I take an oral temperature?

1. **Decide if your child can use the oral (mouth) method.** Your child must be able to:

- Hold the thermometer under the tongue gently but firmly.
- Keep both lips closed around the thermometer.
- Hold the thermometer without biting it.

If your child cannot do these things well or is under 2 years old, use the rectal or axillary method.

2. **Put the silver tip of the thermometer under your child's tongue.** Your child should close his or her lips around the thermometer but not bite down. Wait 15 minutes after your child eats, drinks or brushes their teeth before taking the temperature.
3. **Leave the thermometer in place for about one minute.** When you hear the beep signal, remove the thermometer from your child's mouth and read the temperature.



How do I take an axillary temperature?

If your child just had a bath, wait 15 minutes after to take their temperature. Be sure the armpit is dry and there is no clothing in the way.

1. **Put the tip of the thermometer up in the center of your child's armpit.** Hold your child's arm tight next to the body. You may need to sit next to your child to help them stay still. It may help to put your arm around your child in a hug.
2. **Leave the thermometer in place for one minute.** When you hear the beep, remove the thermometer from your child's armpit and read the temperature.



How do I take a rectal temperature?

1. Put a small amount of vasoline™ on the tip of the thermometer. This will make it easier to insert. **Note: After using a digital thermometer in the rectum, do not use it in the mouth.**
2. Remove the diaper or underpants. Put your child in a comfortable position on the bed or crib, such as lying on the side with knees bent a little bit. A small child or baby may lie on their stomach.
3. Hold your child securely so they do not move. Gently put the silver tip of the thermometer into the rectum. Put it in only ½ inch. Do not force the thermometer or insert it any farther.
4. Keep your child still. If your child moves, the thermometer may fall out. Do not let go of the thermometer. Hold the thermometer in the rectum for about one minute. When you hear the beep, you can remove the thermometer and read the temperature.



How do I clean a digital thermometer?

After using the thermometer, clean it with warm, soapy water. Do not wash the whole thermometer. Start at the tip and only wash about two inches above the silver tip. Dry it with paper or cloth towel. You may also clean the thermometer by wiping it with a cotton ball soaked in 70% isopropyl alcohol.

Where should I store it?

Keep the thermometer in the case it came in. Store it in a place that is out of the reach of children. If stored in a cool place, let the thermometer sit at room temperature for a few minutes before you use it.

How do I read it?

When it reaches your child's temperature, you will hear a signal or beep. This tells you it is time to read the results. The small screen will show your child's temperature. The F stands for degrees Fahrenheit. This is the most common temperature reading used. Some thermometers will use degrees centigrade or C.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.