



[Healthy Children](#) > [Health Issues](#) > [Conditions](#) > [Fever](#) > How to Take a Child's Temperature

Health Issues

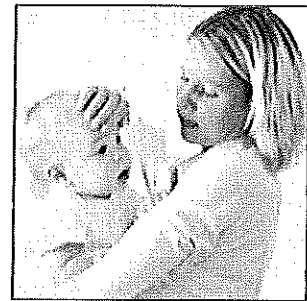
Like 5

How to Take a Child's Temperature

**Taking Your Child's Temperature**

While you often can tell if your child is warmer than usual by feeling his forehead, only a thermometer can tell how high the **temperature** is. Even if your child feels warmer than usual, you do not necessarily need to check this temperature unless he has other signs of illness.

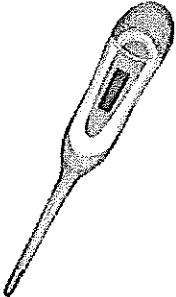
Always use a digital thermometer to check your child's temperature (see "Types of digital thermometers" chart below for more information, including guidelines on what type of thermometer to use by age). Mercury thermometers should not be used. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to remove mercury thermometers from their homes to prevent accidental exposure and poisoning.



**Note:** Temperature readings may be affected by how the temperature is measured and other factors. Your child's temperature and other signs of illness will help your doctor recommend treatment that is best for your child.

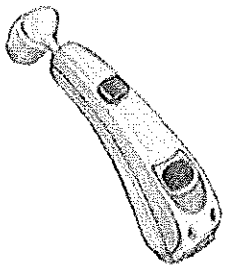
**Types of Digital Thermometers**

The following are 3 types of digital thermometers. While other methods for taking your child's temperature are available, such as pacifier thermometers or fever strips, they are not recommended at this time. Ask your child's doctor for advice.

Type*	How it works	Where to take the temperature	Age	Notes
Digital multiuse thermometer 	Reads body temperature when the sensor located on the tip of the thermometer touches that part of the body.  Can be used rectally, orally, or axillary.	Rectal (in the bottom)  Oral (in the mouth)  Axillary (under the arm)	Birth to 3 years  4 to 5 years and older  Least reliable, technique, but useful for screening at any age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100.4 °F fever guideline is based on taking rectal reading.</li> <li>• Label thermometer "oral" or "rectal". Don't use the same thermometer in both places.</li> <li>• Taking an</li> </ul>

axillary temperature is less reliable. However, this method may be used in schools and child care centers to check (screen) a child's temperature when a child has other signs of illness. the temperature is used as a general guide.

Temporal artery



Reads the infrared heat waves released by the temporal artery, which runs across the forehead just below the skin.

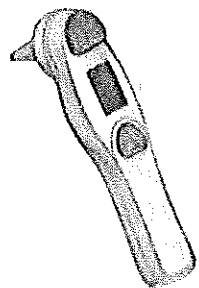
On the side of the forehead

3 months and older

Before 3 months, better as a screening device than armpit temperatures

- May be reliable in newborns and infants younger than 3 months according to new research.

Tympanic



Reads the infrared heat waves released by the eardrum

In the ear

6 months and older

- Not reliable for babies younger than 6 months.
- When used in older children it needs to be placed correctly in your child's ear canal to

- be accurate.
- Too much earwax can cause the reading to be incorrect.

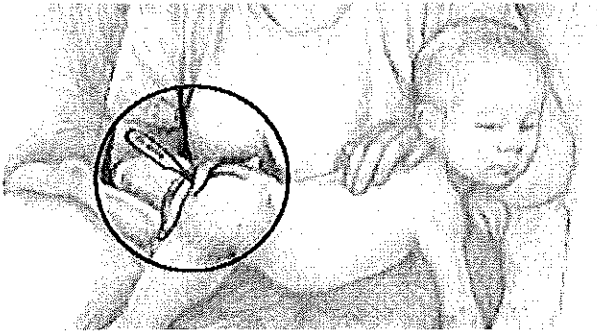
*\*Style and instructions may vary depending on the product.*

## How to Use a Digital Multiuse Thermometer

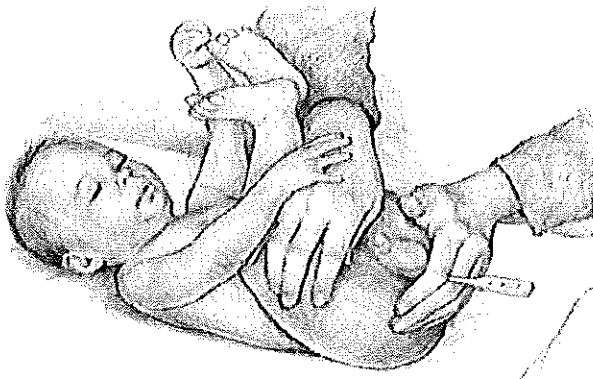
### Rectal temperature

If your child is younger than 3 years, taking a **rectal temperature** gives the best reading. The following is how to take a rectal temperature:

- Clean the end of the thermometer with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Rinse it with cool water. Do not rinse it with hot water.
- Put a small amount of lubricant, such as petroleum jelly, on the end.
- Place your child belly down across your lap or on a firm surface. Hold him by placing your palm against his lower back, just above his bottom. Or place your child face up and bend his legs to his chest. Rest your free hand against the back of the thighs.



- With the other hand, turn the thermometer on and insert it 1/2 inch to 1 inch into the anal opening. Do not insert it too far. Hold the thermometer in place loosely with 2 fingers, keeping your hand cupped around your child's bottom. Keep it there for about 1 minute, until you hear the "beep." Then remove and check the digital reading.

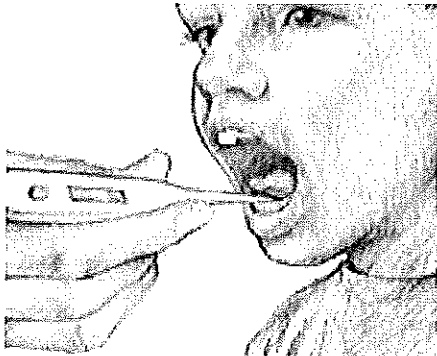


- Be sure to label the rectal thermometer so it's not accidentally used in the mouth.

### Oral temperature

Once your child is 4 or 5 years of age, you can take his temperature by mouth. The following is how to take an oral temperature:

- Clean the thermometer with lukewarm soapy water or rubbing alcohol. Rinse with cool water.
- Turn the thermometer on and place the tip under your child's tongue toward the back of his mouth. Hold in place for about 1 minute, until you hear the "beep." Check the digital reading.
- For a correct reading, wait at least 15 minutes after your child has had a hot or cold drink before putting the thermometer in his mouth.



Digital thermometer drawings by Anthony Alex LeTourneau.

**Last Updated** 6/29/2012

**Source** Fever and Your Child (Copyright © 2007 American Academy of Pediatrics, updated 5/12)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

[topic landing page](#)