

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

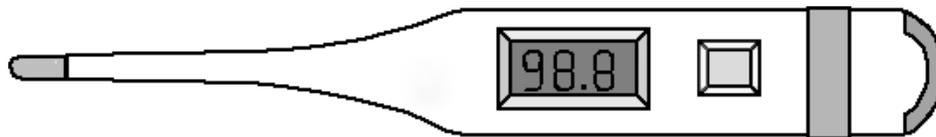
# How to Take Your Child's Temperature

Children often get fevers when they are sick. Your child's doctor will want to know how high the fever is, and whether it comes down with treatment. You can measure the child's temperature with a thermometer.

## Thermometers

There are many types of thermometers.

Many parents choose **digital thermometers**, which come in a range of prices. Read and follow the directions that come with the thermometer. Practice taking your own temperature, so you learn how to tell when it is done measuring the temperature.



**Digital thermometers come in a range of prices.**

Ear (**tympanic**) thermometers are hard to use correctly. Some doctors feel they are not very accurate in young children, so they shouldn't be used in infants. Some doctors say not to use tympanic thermometers in children under 3 years of age.

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend **glass thermometers**. If they break, they expose the child and family to mercury, which is a poison. (If you touch it, the toxin goes through your skin.)

Your child's nurse can teach you how to use and read a glass thermometer.

If you use a glass thermometer, use the right one for the body location:

- **glass rectal thermometer** has a shorter, rounded bulb end
- **glass oral thermometer** has a longer, slimmer end.

• **Pacifier thermometers** and a **thermometer strip** placed on the forehead are not as accurate as other types of thermometers.

## Which way to take the temperature

• Temperatures taken rectally are usually the most accurate. If you don't want to put the thermometer into your child's rectum, use the armpit.

• Do not take a child's temperature by mouth (**orally**) unless the child is old enough to be able to hold the thermometer under the tongue and not bite on it.

• Do not take a child's temperature by mouth if:

- the child has a stuffy nose and has to breathe through the mouth
- the child is confused, and can't keep the thermometer under the tongue



**If your child has a stuffy nose and has to breathe through the mouth, do not take a child's temperature orally.**

# Taking the temperature

- When taking a child's temperature, never leave him or her alone. Stay with your child and make sure your youngster remains still.

Each part of the body where the temperature is measured has a different range of normal. A child has a fever if:

- oral temperature (under the tongue) is over 99.5° F (37.5° C)
- rectal temperature (in the rectum) is over 100.4° F (38.0° C)
- axillary (armpit) temperature is over 99.0° F (37.2° C)
- tympanic (eardrum) temperature depends on how it is set.
  - If it is set on oral, a fever is 99.5° F (37.5° C)
  - If it is set on rectal, a fever is 100.4° F (38.0° C)

If you want more information, ask your nurse or doctor for the handout on **Fever** (#666).

## Taking a temperature under the arm (axillary):

1. Take the shirt off the arm that you will use, so the thermometer will touch the skin.
2. Put the end of the thermometer under your child's arm, in the armpit. The underarm should be dry.
3. Hold your child's arm close to the body.
4. When the thermometer beeps that it is no longer rising, take it out.
5. Read the temperature on the digital readout screen.
6. Write down the time and the temperature.
7. Put the child's shirt back on.

## Taking an oral temperature (under the tongue)

- Do not give your child any hot or cold liquids to drink one-half hour before taking an oral temperature.
1. Put a plastic sleeve on the thermometer.
  2. Place the end of the oral thermometer under your child's tongue.
  3. Have your child gently close his or her lips together.
  4. Have your child hold the other end of the thermometer. This will keep your child from biting it to hold it in place.
  5. Leave the thermometer in your child's mouth until it beeps that it is done.

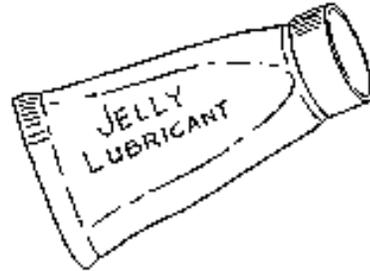
6. Read the temperature on the digital readout screen.
7. Write down the time and the temperature.

### **Taking a tympanic temperature (eardrum)**

- Follow the directions on the package. If you trouble using the tympanic thermometer, ask your child's nurse or doctor to show you how to use it.

### **Taking a rectal temperature (in the rectum):**

1. Place a plastic sleeve on the thermometer, if there is one..
2. Dip the end of the thermometer into a lubricant, such as K-Y jelly or petroleum jelly.
3. Lay your child face down on a bed or across your lap.
4. Spread your child's bottom with your thumb and first finger so that you can see the rectal opening.
5. Gently slide the end of the thermometer into the rectum, about one-half to one inch.
6. Keep the thermometer in place by holding your child's bottom tightly together with one hand, and the thermometer steadied in the other.
7. When the thermometer beeps that it is no longer rising, take it out of your child's rectum.
8. Read the temperature on the digital readout screen.
9. Write down the time and the temperature.
10. Wipe the thermometer with a tissue or toilet paper and then clean according to the directions in the package.



**Dip the end of the thermometer into a lubricant.**

### **Now that you have read this:**

- Show your nurse or doctor how you would take your child's temperature.  
(Check when done.)



If you have any questions or concerns,  
 call your child's doctor or  call \_\_\_\_\_

If you want to know more about child health and illness,  
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital  
1919 East Thomas Road  
Phoenix, AZ 85016  
602-933-1400  
866-933-6459  
[www.phoenixchildrens.org](http://www.phoenixchildrens.org)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/theemilycenter](https://www.facebook.com/theemilycenter)  
Twitter: @emilycenter  
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**Disclaimer**

The information provided at this site is intended to be general information, and is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of examination, treatment, or consultation with a physician. Phoenix Children's Hospital urges you to contact your physician with any questions you may have about a medical condition.

August 11, 2014 • DRAFT to family review  
#533 • Written by From Do At Home or Call the Doctor; updated by Eileen Mitchell, MN, RN  
• Illustrated by Dennis Swain

# How to Take Your Child's Temperature

Name of Health Care Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Date returned: \_\_\_\_\_  db

## Family Review of Handout

Health care providers: Please teach families with this handout.

Families: Please let us know what you think of this handout.

Would you say this handout is hard to read?  Yes  No

easy to read?  Yes  No

Please circle the parts of the handout that were hard to understand.

Would you say this handout is interesting to read?  Yes  No

Why or why not?

Would you do anything differently after reading  
this handout?  Yes  No

If yes, what?

After reading this handout, do you have any  
questions about the subject?  Yes  No

If yes, what?

Is there anything you don't like about the drawings?

Yes

No

If yes, what?

What changes would you make in this handout to make it better or easier to understand?

Please return your review of this handout to your nurse or doctor or send it to the address below.

The Emily Center  
Health Education Specialist  
Phoenix Children's Hospital  
1919 East Thomas Road  
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7710

602-933-1395

**Thank you for helping us!**