

# Facts

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## HOW TO TAKE A CHILD'S TEMPERATURE

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### Ways to Take the Temperature

*There are four ways to take a child's temperature:*

1. by the mouth (oral)
2. by the bum (rectal)
3. in the ear (tympanic)
4. under the armpit (axillary)

*The best method to choose for an exact reading depends on your child's age:*

- **Older than 5 years:** first choice—*oral*, second—ear, third—armpit.
- **Between 2 and 5 years:** best choice—*rectal*, second—ear, third—armpit.
- **Birth to 2 years:** best choice—*rectal*, second choice—armpit.

### Types of Thermometers

- There are two types of glass thermometers: one for oral and axillary temperatures (it has a long slender bulb at one end, containing mercury) and one with a short, stubby, larger bulb for rectal temperatures. As the mercury expands, in response to the heat from the child's body, it moves up the column.
- A digital thermometer can be used for rectal, oral and armpit temperature taking. It is made of unbreakable plastic, is easy to read and measures temperature faster than glass.
- Ear thermometers are available but are expensive.
- A fever strip is not recommended because it does not give an accurate temperature reading.

### Mouth Method (Oral)

*If you are using a glass thermometer:*

- Be sure it is an oral thermometer.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse (hot water causes the mercury to expand and may burst the thermometer).
- Hold the thermometer at the end away from the mercury and shake it with firm downward flicks of the wrist so that the mercury goes below 36°C.
- Do not give the child cold or hot liquids for half an hour before taking his/her temperature.
- Carefully place the tip of the thermometer under the child's tongue. Tell him/her to close the mouth but not to bite down.
- Note: This method is not recommended for children under 5 years of age.
- With the child's mouth closed, leave the thermometer in place for 3 to 4 minutes. Stay with child and make sure he/she remains still.

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## **How to Take a Child's Temperature**

- Remove thermometer. Hold it near the light and slowly turn it until the line of mercury is seen. Read the temperature where the line of mercury ends.
- Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse. Use a cotton swab soaked in alcohol to rub down the thermometer.
- Store the thermometer in a container to prevent breakage.

### *If you are using a digital thermometer:*

- Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer tip under tongue and close mouth.
- Wait for the thermometer to beep.
- Read the temperature on the display.
- Press the button to turn the thermometer off.
- To clean a digital thermometer, wash only the tip with soap and warm (not hot) water and wipe off with alcohol after use. Dry well.

## **Rectal Method**

- If you are using a glass thermometer, be sure it is a rectal thermometer.
- Clean the thermometer with cool, soapy water and rinse (hot water causes the mercury to expand and may burst the thermometer).
- Hold the thermometer at the end away from the mercury and shake it with firm downward flicks of the wrist so that the mercury goes below 36°C (96.8°F).
- Cover the silver tip with petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline).
- Place the baby on his/her back with his knees bent.
- Gently insert the thermometer in the rectum, about 2.5 cm (1 inch), while holding it with your fingers.
- Hold for at least two minutes. Remove the thermometer. Hold it near the light and slowly turn it until the line of mercury is seen. Read the temperature where the line of mercury ends.
- Clean the thermometer with cool soapy water and rinse. Use a cotton swab soaked in alcohol to rub down the thermometer.
- Store the thermometer in a container to prevent breakage.

## **Ear Method**

- Use a clean probe tip each time, and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it up and back. This will help straighten the ear canal, and make a clear path inside the ear to the eardrum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold down the button for one second.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.

Note: This method is not recommended for children under one year of age.

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## **How to Take a Child's Temperature (Continued)**

### **Armpit Method (Axillary)**

#### ***If you are using a glass thermometer:***

- Clean the thermometer and shake down the mercury as in Mouth Method.
- Place the silver tip of the thermometer in the centre of the armpit.
- Make sure your child's arm is tucked snugly against his/her body.
- Leave the thermometer in place for at least 4 minutes.
- Remove, read, clean and store the thermometer.

#### ***To use a digital thermometer:***

- Press the button to turn the thermometer on.
- Put the thermometer in the centre of your child's armpit. The silver tip must touch the skin.
- Hold the top of the thermometer with one hand and hold down your child's arm with the other hand.
- Wait for the thermometer to beep.
- Read the temperature on display.
- Press the button to turn the thermometer off.
- To clean a digital thermometer, wash only the tip with soap and warm (not hot) water and wipe off with alcohol after use. Dry well.

### **What is a Normal Temperature?**

The normal temperature varies, depending on the method you use:

- Mouth: 35.5°C to 37.5°C (95.9°F to 99.5°F)
- Rectum: 36.6°C to 38°C (97.9°F to 100.4°F)
- Ear: 35.8°C to 38°C (96.4°F to 100.4°F)
- Armpit: 34.7°C to 37.3°C (94.5°F to 99.1°F)

**For more information,  
please contact your physician or the Health Unit at 376-9420**

*Reference: Canadian Draft Pandemic Influenza Plan, 2002*