

Taking Your Child's Temperature

There are lots of thermometers out there, but a digital thermometer is the easiest and fastest way to take your child's temperature.

A digital thermometer can be used in 3 ways: in the rectum, the mouth, or the armpit.

Let's start with the rectal.

Because it measures the temperature inside the body, it's the most correct—the most accurate.

And that's important for toddlers and babies.

Especially young babies.

Because when a newborn has a fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius or higher, it can be serious— so serious that you need to go to the doctor right away.

Here's how to take a rectal temp.

Put some petroleum jelly, like Vaseline, on the tip of the thermometer.

Find a quiet place.

Have your child lie facedown on a bed or on your lap, with their pants off or pulled down.

Spread your child's buttocks with one hand.

Use the other hand to gently insert the thermometer about about half to 1 inch in— without forcing it.

Wait for the beep.

Remove the thermometer.

Read it, and clean it with soap and warm water.

Of course, some parents—and kids—don't love taking a rectal temp.

So let's talk about oral, which means by mouth.

Unless you have disposable covers, don't use a thermometer that's been used rectally.

If you don't want to use covers, it can help to have two clearly labeled thermometers.

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If your child can keep the thermometer in the right place for long enough, oral is the second most accurate method.

But if your child just had a hot or cold drink, you might need to wait a few minutes so you don't get a false reading.

Here's how it works.

Place the thermometer under the tongue, just to one side of the center.

Have them close their lips tightly around it.

Wait for the beep.

Then remove, read, and clean the thermometer.

Okay, the last way is under the armpit.

It's the least accurate, but it is easier for parents and kids.

The temperature is a little lower than from an oral or rectal reading.

Here's how: Put the thermometer under the arm, with the tip in the center of the armpit.

Have your child press their arm against their body.

Wait for the beep—and remove, read, and clean.

So that's 3 ways to take your child's temperature.

Here are a few other things to keep in mind.

A fever is usually defined as 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius or higher.

When a newborn has a fever, it's time to go to the doctor.

For a baby or child, it's time to call the doctor if the fever lasts more than 48 hours, or your child is not acting like they usually do.

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You know your child best.

So if you have any questions or concerns, call your doctor or nurse care line.

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