

Taking Your Child's Temperature

When your child feels warm or seems out of sorts, knowing if a fever might be the cause can be helpful.

Here's how to take your child's temperature, safely and accurately.

What Type of Thermometer Should I Use?

Digital thermometers give the quickest, most accurate readings, and are the only kind that doctors currently recommend.

Three types are available:

- **Regular digital thermometers** are straight with a temperature sensor at the tip and an easy-to-read digital display. They can be used to measure rectal, oral, or axillary (armpit) temperatures.
- **Ear digital thermometers** measure the heat waves from the eardrum through a plastic probe put inside the ear. These are for use only with kids 6 months of age and older.
- **Temporal artery digital thermometers** measure heat waves from the temporal artery, a blood vessel that passes just below the skin across the forehead. They can be used for kids of all ages and adults. Temporal artery thermometers made by different manufacturers have slightly different instructions for use, so read the package insert if you use one.

Check the manufacturer's instructions to see what the thermometer is designed for and how it signals that the reading is complete.

Note: Some types of thermometers aren't recommended because they're less accurate. These include plastic strip thermometers, pacifier thermometers, and smartphone temperature apps. Also, **don't use** a glass thermometer, as these aren't safe.

Tips for Taking Temperatures by Age

As any parent knows, taking a squirming child's temperature can be a challenge. The best method will depend on a child's age and how well they can cooperate.

Taking temperature by age:

- **Babies younger than 3 months old:** A rectal temperature is best.
- **Babies 3 to 6 months old:** A rectal temperature is best, but you can use a temporal artery or axillary method.
- **Kids 6 months to 3 years old:** A rectal temperature is best, but you can use a temporal artery, ear, or axillary method.

- **Kids 4 years or older:** An oral temperature is best if child can properly hold the thermometer under the tongue. If not, you can use a rectal, temporal, ear, or axillary method.

How to take a rectal temperature

How to take an oral temperature

How to take an axillary temperature

Whatever method you choose, keep these tips in mind:

- Avoid taking your child's temperature right after a bath or if they were under blankets or in multiple layers (or swaddled, if an infant). This can affect the temperature reading.
- Stay with your child while you take their temperature.

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