Let's Talk ABOUT...

The temperature reading on a thermometer can tell you if your child has a fever. Take your child's temperature with a thermometer when he feels sick.

Many thermometers have two temperature scales. One says "F," which stands for **Fahrenheit** (FAIR-en –hite), and one says "C," which stands for **Celsius** (SELL-see-us) or **Centigrade** (CENT-ih-grade). These two systems are equally good. The temperatures you hear in weather forecasts are in Fahrenheit, and healthcare workers often use Celsius.

What is a normal temperature for a child?

A normal temperature measured in the mouth is 98.6°F (37°C) and can be between 97°F and 99°F (36.1°C to 37.2°C). Different people have slightly different "normal" body temperatures. Your child's normal temperature may be slightly higher at night than in the morning.

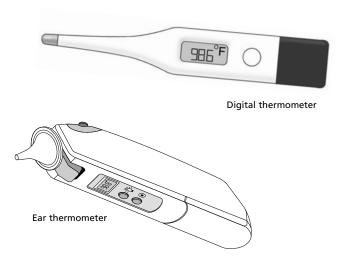
When should I take my child's temperature?

Fevers can cause changes in your child's appearance. Take your child's temperature if he has any of these changes: sweaty, a flushed face, sleepy, poor appetite, dry and hot skin, unusual breathing, cold symptoms, or he feels warm to the touch.

What kind of thermometers should I use?

There are different types of digital probe thermometers. Common types are oral (placed in the mouth), rectal (placed in the rectum l) or placed in the armpit. Be sure you know the difference between these different kinds of thermometers (see pictures). Digital oral, rectal, and armpit thermometers are not expensive. These replaced the old glass thermometers. You can buy them in

Temperature



grocery and drug stores everywhere. They are sturdy, easy to read, and beep when they are ready for you to read.

How do I measure (take) my child's temperature?

There are three places to take your child's temperature: in the **rectum, armpit,** or **mouth.** These places are discussed below.

Rectal temperature

If your child is younger than 4 years, it is best to take his temperature in the rectum.

- **1.** To take a rectal temperature, use a digital thermometer that says on the box that it may be used rectally. Read the directions carefully before you use the thermometer.
- **2.** Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- **3.** Coat the tip with K-Y Jelly® or Vaseline®. Read the thermometer's directions to make sure that you can use these lubricants. Some models



supply plastic covers, if so, use these and then use the lubricant.

- **4.** Put your child on his stomach. Spread his buttocks until you can see the anal opening.
- **5.** Carefully insert the thermometer into the anus, no more than ½ inch.
- **6.** Hold your child to keep him from moving too much. Try to keep him still by placing one hand on the small of his back. With your other hand, hold the thermometer firmly between your fingers and place your palm on his buttocks. Do not leave your child alone while you take his temperature. He could be seriously injured by a rectal thermometer if you leave him alone.
- **7.** If you use a digital thermometer, wait until the thermometer beeps, then take it out. A normal rectal temperature is 99.6°F (37.6°C).



- **8.** Wash the thermometer with lukewarm water and soap. If you have rubbing alcohol, clean the thermometer with it and a soft cloth. Put the thermometer back in its case. Store it in a safe place, away from your child's reach.
- **9.** Wash your hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer.

Armpit (axillary) temperature

To take an armpit temperature, you can use a clean rectal or oral thermometer.

- **1.** Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- **2.** Place the thermometer in your child's bare, dry armpit and have him hold his arm tightly against his body (see illustration, next column).
- **3.** Stay with your child while you take his temperature.
- **4.** After a digital thermometer beeps, remove the thermometer. A normal armpit temperature is 97.6°F (36.5°C).
- 5. Wash the thermometer with lukewarm water and soap. If you have rubbing alcohol clean the thermometer with it and a soft cloth. Place the thermometer back to its case. Store it in a safe place, away from your child's reach.
- **6.** Wash your hands with soap and water, or use a hand sanitizer.

Mouth (oral) temperature

To take an oral temperature, use a digital thermometer that says on the box that you can use it orally. This method is best for children over four years old who can follow instructions and not bite the thermometer. If your child has a stuffy nose, consider using a rectal or axillary thermometer instead.

- **1.** Wash your hands with soap and water, or use a hand sanitizer.
- **2.** Ask your child to open his mouth.
- **3.** Carefully place the thermometer tip under his tongue. Tell your child to close his lips carefully

- around the thermometer (tell him not to bite it or talk).
- **4.** After the digital thermometer beeps, remove the thermometer. A normal oral temperature is 98.6°F (37°C).
- **5.** Stay with your child while you take his temperature.
- **6.** Wash the thermometer with lukewarm water and soap. If you have rubbing alcohol, clean the thermometer with it and a soft cloth. Place the thermometer back to its case. Store it in a safe place, away from your child's reach.
- **7.** Wash your hands with soap and water, or use a hand sanitizer

What should I do if my child's temperature is not normal?

- If your child's temperature is higher or lower than expected, take his temperature again. Make sure you use the thermometer in the way the manufacturer recommends. If you think this is not accurate, take his temperature again using a different method (oral, rectal or axillary) or use a different thermometer. If the temperature is still not normal, call your child's health care provider.
- Contact your healthcare provider if your child's temperature is different than the normal temperature listed above.

• If your child is 3 months or younger and his temperature is more than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees centigrade) or less than 97.5 degrees Fahrenheit (36.5 degrees centigrade), contact your child's healthcare provider.

Mercury-glass thermometers

Primary Children's Hospital does not distribute or provide information about using mercury-glass thermometers. Mercury is a dangerous material. Mercury-glass thermometers are not available in stores anymore (digital thermometers have replaced them). If one of these thermometers breaks do not touch the mercury; it is very poisonous. Use gloves and clean it with something you can throw away. Do not throw mercury containing or mercury-glass thermometers away in the trash, because the mercury is "hazardous waste." Call your local Household Hazardous Waste hotline or Health Department for instructions on how to dispose mercury thermometers.

