

Caring for a Young Child with Fever



Sometimes children develop fevers. Here are some things for you to know.

What is a fever? It is a rise above the normal body temperature. Fever is a symptom, not a disease and is usually caused by an infection. Not all fevers are dangerous. A child with a mild infection can have a high fever, while a child with a severe infection might have no fever at all. The degree (how high the fever is) does not tell you how serious your child's illness is - how your child is acting is usually a better sign.

What is a normal temperature?

Method	Normal temperature range
Rectum	36.6°C to 38°C (97.9°F to 100.4°F)
Armpit	36.5°C to 37.5°C (97.8°F to 99.5°F)
Ear	35.8°C to 38°C (96.4°F to 100.4°F)

What is the best way to take a temperature?

Age	Recommended method
Birth to 2 years	1st choice: Rectum 2nd choice: Armpit
3 to 5 years	1st choice: Rectum 2nd choice: Armpit 3rd choice: Ear

What can I do if my child has a fever?

Keep your child comfortable, and offer plenty of fluids. If you are breastfeeding, breastfeed more often.

Extra blankets and clothing should be removed so that heat can leave your child's body. Do not remove all your child's clothing, this may make the child too cold and start to shiver, which creates more body heat and will cause the temperature to rise again.

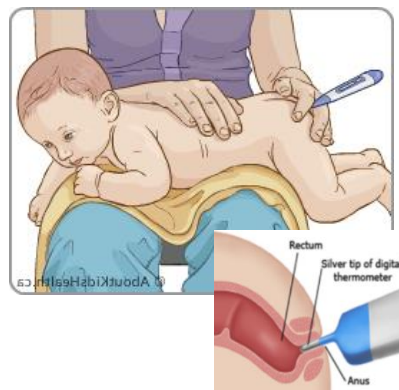
Medication is not always needed to treat a fever. In fact, the best reason to give your child medicine is to treat the aches and pains, although it can be recommended if a child has a fever. Follow the directions on the bottle/box of the medication.

What is the best way to take my child's temperature?

- Do not use a mercury glass thermometer, as it is dangerous to your child if the glass breaks.
- Be sure to read the package instructions for your thermometer.
- Follow the cleaning instructions on the package prior to and after use.

Rectal is the most reliable way to ensure a fever is not missed.

- Lay your child face down across your lap.
- Put a dab of petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) on the end of the thermometer.
- Gently insert the thermometer into the child's anus until the silver tip is not visible (1/4 to 1/2 inch [6 to 12 millimeters] inside the anus).
- Hold the thermometer in place.
- After about 1 minute, you will hear the beep.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.



Armpit is not as accurate as a rectal temperature. If this method does not show a fever, but your child feels warm and unwell, take a rectal measurement.

- Place the tip of the thermometer in the middle of your child's dry armpit.
- Make sure your child's arm is tucked snugly against their body.
- Hold the thermometer in place.
- After about 1 minute, you will hear the beep.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature.



Ear method is quick, but can give temperature readings that are too low, even when the manufacturer's directions are followed. It is not as reliable nor as accurate as the rectal method.

- Gently tug on the ear, pulling it back. This will help straighten the ear canal, and make a clear path inside the ear to the ear drum.
- Gently insert the thermometer until the ear canal is fully sealed off.
- Squeeze and hold down the button for one to two seconds.
- Remove the thermometer and read the temperature



You should seek help if your child:

- Has a fever and is less than 6 months old
- Is excessively sleepy, lethargic or does not respond
- Has a fever combined with a rash or any other signs of illness that worry you
- Has a fever for more than 72 hours
- Is excessively cranky, fussy or irritable
- Is persistently wheezing or coughing

For more information or assistance:



Call:

- Your Community Health Nurse
- Your Pharmacist
- Your Physician/Nurse Practitioner
- The **811** HealthLine/TTY 1-888-709-3555



Or Visit:

[Eastern Health - A to Z: Healthy Living](#)