

Taking your Child's Temperature

Introduction

The best way to measure a child's temperature depends upon several factors. In all children, a rectal temperature is the most accurate. However, it is possible to accurately measure the temperature in the mouth (for children older than four or five years) when the proper technique is used.

Temperatures measured in the armpit are less accurate but may be useful as a first test in an infant who is younger than three months or an older child who cannot hold the thermometer under his or her tongue. Ear Temperatures measured in the ear or on the forehead also are less accurate than temperatures measured rectally or orally and may need to be confirmed. It is not accurate to measure a child's temperature by feeling the child's skin as it is highly dependent upon the temperature of the person who is feeling the child's skin.

Glass versus Digital thermometers

Glass thermometers that contain mercury are not recommended due to the potential risks of exposure to mercury (which is toxic) if the thermometer is broken. If a digital thermometer is not available, be sure to carefully "shake down" the glass thermometer before use.

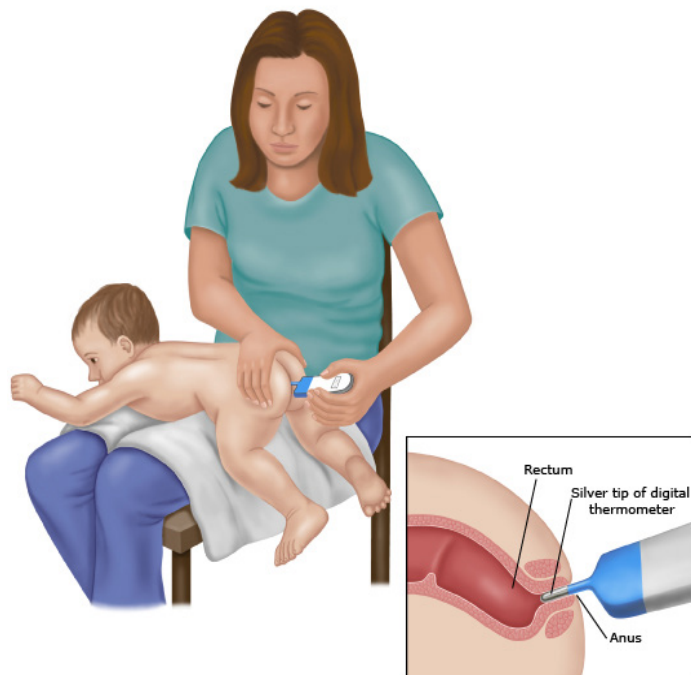


Figure 2: Measuring Rectal Temperature



Figure 2: Measuring Ear Temperature

Rectal Temperature

The child or infant should lie down on his or her stomach across an adult's lap (see Figure 1). Apply a small amount of petroleum jelly (Eg. Vaseline) to the end of the thermometer. Gently insert the thermometer into the child's anus until the silver tip of the thermometer is not visible (1/4 to 1/2 inch inside the anus). Hold the thermometer in place for one to two minutes.

Oral Temperature

Do not measure the temperature in a child's mouth if he or she has consumed a hot or cold food or drink in the last 30 minutes. Clean the thermometer with cool water and soap. Rinse with water. Place the tip of the thermometer under the child's tongue toward the back. Ask the child to hold the thermometer with his or her lips. Keep the lips sealed for one to three minutes.

Armpit Temperature

Place the tip of the thermometer in the child's dry armpit. Hold the thermometer in place by holding the child's elbow against the chest for four to five minutes.

Ear Temperature

Ear thermometers are not as accurate as rectal or oral thermometers. If the child has been outside on a cold day, wait 15 minutes before measuring the ear temperature. To measure temperature accurately in the ear, the parent must pull the child's outer ear backward before inserting the thermometer. Hold the ear probe in the child's ear for about two seconds.