

# Fever

*Information Intended for Parents*



This document is intended to compliment the information you received from health care professionals during your visit to the hospital.

If the doctor has examined your child, and has asked you to monitor your child's fever; or if you saw the triage nurse, and you decided to leave the hospital before seeing the doctor; the following information may be helpful to you.

### What is fever?

Fever is the sign of an increase in body temperature. It occurs when microbes (virus or bacteria) are present in the body. Fever is a defense mechanism that helps the body fight against microbes. It is **a symptom and not an illness**.

The following are a few signs related to fever:

- Shivers
- Chills
- Headache
- Warm skin
- Increased heart rate
- Increased breathing pace
- General weakness
- Uneven complexion

### What is the body's normal temperature?

Your child's temperature will vary depending on the body part used for taking their temperature.

Area of the Body	Normal Temperature Range
Rectum	36,6°C to 38,4°C (97,9°F to 101,12°F)
Mouth	35,5°C to 37,9°C (95,9°F to 100,22°F)
Armpit*	34,7°C to 37,4°C (94,5°F to 99,3°F)
Ear*	35,8°C to 38,0°C (96,4°F to 100,4°F)

\* Taking your child's temperature in the ear or under the armpit provides a less accurate reading. Consider these areas as a last resort when taking your child's temperature.



Your child has fever when their body temperature is equal or greater than:

1. Rectal (rectum): 38.5°C or 101.5°F
2. Oral (mouth): 38.0°C or 100.4°F
3. Axillary (armpit): 37.5°C or 99.0°F
4. Tympanic (ear): 38.0°C or 100.4°F

### How to take your child's temperature?

Do not use a mercury fever thermometer. If it falls or breaks, your child will be dangerously exposed to toxic substances.

There are 4 methods for taking your child's temperature: rectal, oral, axillary and tympanic. Choosing the appropriate method will depend on your child's age. The following chart will help you choose the suitable method for taking your child's temperature.

Age	Recommended Area
Birth to 2 years	Choice 1 : Rectum (for an accurate reading) Choice 2 : Ear
2 to 5 years	Choice 1 : Rectum (for an accurate reading) Choice 2 : Ear or armpit
Over 5 years	Choice 1 : Mouth or rectum (for an accurate reading) Choice 2 : Ear or armpit

To get an accurate reading of your child's temperature, you must do so correctly. The following are a few helpful tips:

- Except for the tympanic method, the other 3 methods require that you thoroughly wash your thermometer after each use. Wash in cool, soapy water and rinse well.
- The ear thermometer has a probe cover that must be discarded after each use. Carefully read the instructions provided by the manufacturer before using the thermometer.

Tips for taking a rectal temperature :

- Gently insert the thermometer into your child's rectum (about 3 cm). Dab some jelly (Vaseline) on the thermometer, or wet it in cool water to make it easier to insert into the rectum.

Taking a rectal temperature is the best method for babies and toddlers, or for children who do not listen to instructions when taking their temperature orally

Tips for taking an oral temperature :

- Place the thermometer under your child's tongue. Make sure their lips remain properly closed. The required time to get a reading will depend on the type of thermometer used.
- Do not give your child anything to eat or drink for up to 30 minutes before taking their temperature. Drinking or eating modifies body temperature.

Tips for storing your thermometer

- Do not store your thermometer in direct sunlight or near a heater.
- Do not wash your thermometer in hot water. Wash it in cool, soapy water.
- Check the battery power, if you are using a digital fever thermometer.

### What to do when your child has fever?

- Give your child fever-relieving medication containing acetaminophen (ex.: Tylenol™, Acet™, Atasol™, Tempra™, etc.). Be sure to use as directed.
- Opt for acetaminophen in the form of suppositories that can be inserted in the rectum, if your child experiences vomiting.
- Dress your child in light clothes.
- Keep your child in an airy room at a temperature of about 20°C.
- Make sure that your child drinks plenty of fluids regularly as your child may lose body fluids as a result of sweating.
- Make sure your child rests.

### What to avoid?

- Do not force feed your child. It is normal that your child isn't hungry.
- Do not give your child baths or alcohol rubs, and do not expose your child to ventilators as they can provoke chills, causing their body temperature to rise.
- Do not give Aspirin™ to children under the age of 18 years.

Note: Body temperature generally decreases within 1.5 to 2 hours after having taken acetaminophen, to then rise again. This is the medication's normal effect. You must nevertheless wait a minimum of 4 hours between each dose.

### When to see the doctor?

*It is important to point out that the degree of the fever is not necessarily related to the significance to your child's condition.*

- If your child is **less than 3 months old**, you should see your doctor when your child has fever or when their temperature is too low:  $\leq 36^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $96.8^{\circ}\text{F}$ ; or  $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$  (rectal temperature).
- If your child is **less than 2 years old**, you should see your doctor when your child continues to have fever for more than 48 hours. If your child is experiencing symptoms other than fever, see your doctor as soon as possible.
- If your child is **more than 2 years old**, and has no other symptoms, you should wait 48 to 72 hours before seeing your doctor.

### You should also see your doctor when...

- your child's general health is deteriorating;
- your child complains of pain or stiffness in the neck;
- your child is showing unusual red blotches on the skin;
- your child has trouble waking up when sleeping;
- your child is very irritable;
- your child has trouble breathing;
- your child's fever persists for more than 3 days after seeing the doctor;
- your child vomits the medication that the doctor prescribed.

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#### **References**

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