



Iowa Department of Public Health

Fact Sheet for Foster Care

How to Properly Take and Read Temperatures in Childrenⁱ

While you often can tell if a child has a fever by touching their skin or asking the child if they feel "warm or hot," only a thermometer can tell what the temperature is.

Types of Thermometers:

- 1) **Oral and axillary digital thermometers** are the easiest way to measure temperature in young children.
 - **Oral (under the tongue) temperatures** can be used for children over age 4 years, who clearly understand that they should not bite the thermometer. If the child bites the thermometer—then use the axillary temperature method.
 - **Axillary (in the armpit) temperatures** are a good option for infants and young children.
- 2) **Digital ear thermometers** (tympanic thermometers) can be used in children greater than 4 months of age but must be placed correctly in the child's ear to give accurate temperature reading. Too much earwax can cause incorrect readings.
- 3) **Do not use glass and mercury thermometers**
 - Mercury is a toxic heavy metal
 - Glass thermometers are easily broken and pose an injury hazard

How to Take a Child's Temperature:

- Clean the end of the thermometer according to the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning.
- If you do not have the manufacturer's instructions, clean the tip of the thermometer with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.
 - Rinse it with cool water.
 - **Do not** rinse the thermometer in hot water, as this will result in an incorrect temperature reading.
- Place an individual plastic thermometer cover on the thermometer.
- **ORAL:** Turn the digital thermometer "on" and place the tip under child's tongue toward the back of child's mouth. Hold in place for about one minute or until you hear the "beep." Check the digital reading.
 - For a correct reading, wait at least 15 minutes after a child has had a hot or cold drink before putting the thermometer in his mouth.
- **AXILLARY:** Turn the digital thermometer "on" and place the tip in the child's armpit. Hold his arm tightly against his side and chest for about one minute, until you hear the "beep." Check the digital reading.

Reading the Thermometer:

- The site where a child's temperature is taken (oral or axillary) and the time the temperature was taken should be documented.
- Axillary temperatures are approximately one degree (Fahrenheit) lower than oral temperatures.

ⁱ Retrieved and adapted by Healthy Child Care Iowa on September 14, 2009, from the American Academy of Pediatrics parent health education page: http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Fever.htm.