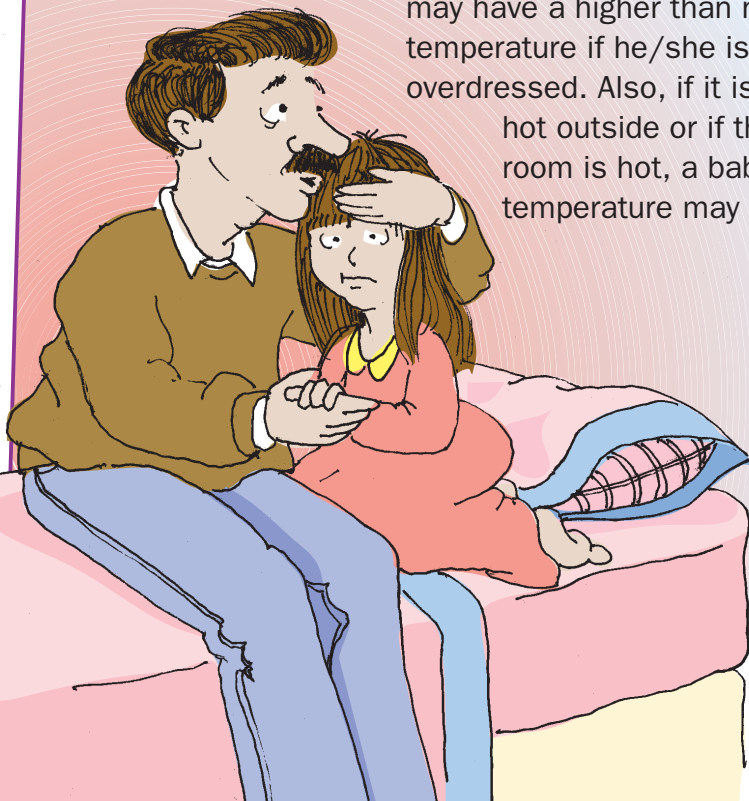


# CARING for a CHILD with a FEVER

## What is normal body temperature?

Body temperature changes throughout the day. It is lowest in the early morning between 4 and 6 a.m., and highest in the early evening between 6 and 8 p.m. "Normal" temperature is about 37°C or 98.6°F. However, it can be as low as 36.1°C (97°F) in the early morning to a high of 37.2°C (99°F) in the evening and still be considered normal. An infant

may have a higher than normal temperature if he/she is overdressed. Also, if it is hot outside or if the room is hot, a baby's temperature may rise.



## What is a fever?

Fever means that the body temperature is higher than normal. Fever may help your child fight an illness. A child who has a virus or an infection often has a fever. If a child has a fever over 38°C it usually means that he has an infection. Children may also have higher temperature the day after receiving the DPT vaccine or 7 to 10 days after receiving the MMR vaccine.



## How do you know if a young child has a fever?

### 1. Observe the child.

A young child with a fever will often appear ill. The child may:

- look flushed or pale
- feel hot or cool to the touch
- be fussy or groggy
- have “goose bumps”, shivers or tremors
- sweat, and/or
- be thirsty.

### 2. Take the child’s temperature.

You can tell if your child has a fever by taking the child’s temperature with a thermometer.

## What is the best way to take a temperature?

The armpit (axilla) is the best place to take the temperature in infants and children under six years old. It is easy and accurate.

Taking the temperature in the mouth (oral) is unsafe because a young child can bite and break the thermometer. Also the reading can be inaccurate because it is hard to keep a thermometer under the child’s tongue.

Do not take the temperature in the rectum (bum). This can be dangerous and upsetting to the child.



## IMPORTANT!

If your baby is under six months old, call your doctor, public health nurse or hospital as soon as you realize your baby has a fever.

If your child is over six months old, contact your doctor, public health nurse or hospital if:

- the fever lasts more than 24 hours
- your child also has a cough, difficulty breathing, unusual drowsiness, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, stiff neck, earache, headache, or sore throat.

## How do you take a temperature in the armpit?

### 1. Shake the thermometer down.

Hold the glass end (not the mercury bulb end) of the thermometer. Shake the mercury down below 36°C (96.6°F) by flicking the wrist quickly several times. Be careful not to hit anything when you are shaking the thermometer.

### 2. Take the temperature

Lift one of the child's arms and place the mercury bulb end of the thermometer firmly into the upper part of the armpit. Lower the child's arm and hold it firmly against the child's body. The bulb of the thermometer must be kept in the armpit for at least five minutes.

**Taking the child's temperature with thermometer in the armpit.**

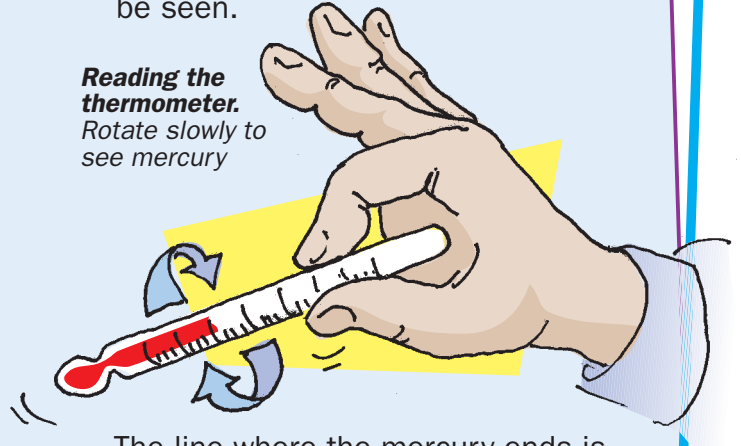


It is easier to take the child's temperature if the child is sitting on your lap, with one arm behind your back. A quiet activity such as reading a book may help keep the child still.

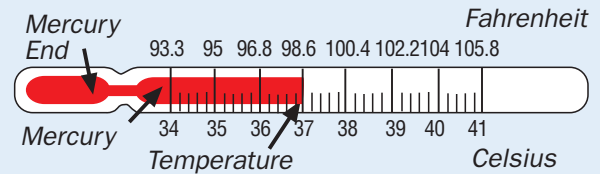
### 3. Read the temperature

Hold the glass end of the thermometer between your thumb and forefinger. Slowly turn the thermometer until the mercury can be seen.

**Reading the thermometer.**  
*Rotate slowly to see mercury*



The line where the mercury ends is the child's temperature



**Thermometer showing Fahrenheit and Celsius.**

Sometimes it is hard to remember an exact temperature. Therefore it is a good idea to write the temperature down each time you take it.

### 4. Care of the thermometer

After use, shake the thermometer to get the mercury down again, (step 1) and wash with soap and cold water, rinse with cold water.

**Caution: Hot water will break the thermometer.**

## What should you do if your child has a fever?

You can help your child be more comfortable by letting him/her rest, giving plenty of fluids and taking the following steps to help lower the fever.

- Keep the room cool.
- Keep your child in light clothing – diapers/panties or diapers/panties and T-shirt. This allows the extra heat to escape from the child’s body.
- Remove blankets – cover only with a sheet. Replace some covers if the child is shivering.
- Sponge or bathe the child with lukewarm water. Make sure you sponge the face, neck, armpits and groin – these are the areas most important for cooling the body. If your child becomes chilled and starts to shiver, stop sponging, dry and dress the child and cover lightly. Check the temperature 30 minutes after sponging.
- NEVER use alcohol or cold water to sponge the child. This can cause shivering and a rise in temperature. Alcohol is a poison and can be absorbed through the child’s skin. Also alcohol fumes are irritating.
- Encourage your child to drink lots of water, watered-down apple juice, “flat” soft drinks or popsicles.
- Feed your child if he/she is hungry. However, many children with a fever will not feel hungry.
- **Medication:**  
Acetaminophen is the best drug for lowering fever in children and teenagers. There are many brands of acetaminophen including Tylenol, Atasol, Temptra, Exdol and Panadol. Each brand comes in different forms such as drops, liquid, syrup, elixir, tablets and capsules.  
  
The form of medication and dosage depends on your child’s weight and age. Read product labels carefully for dosage and ingredients. For advice, contact your child’s doctor or your pharmacist.  
  
Acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin, Anacin) is not recommended because it has been associated with a rare and often fatal disease called Reye’s Syndrome.

***If you have other questions, please call your local community health office or your doctor.***