Taking Your Baby’s Temperature

Types of thermometers
There are several types of thermometers, for example:
• Digital thermometers are the safest and most accurate for newborns and infants until age 3. They come in rectal, oral and axillary (under the arm).
• Tympanic thermometers (which measure inside the ear) are an option for children older than age 3, but may be incorrect because of the structure of the ear canal or from ear wax.
• Mercury thermometers should not be used and should be disposed of to prevent accidental exposure to this toxin.
  – Check with your local pharmacy for the correct way to dispose of your mercury thermometers.

Taking the rectal temperature (do only if care provider requests)
• Do not take a rectal temperature unless you are sure and comfortable with doing taking the temperature this way.
• Normal rectal temperature is about 99.6° F (37.6° C), with a range of 98° F (36.6° C) to 100.4° F (38° C).
  Fever is a rectal temperature greater than 100.4° F (38° C).
• Insert the thermometer into a probe cover.
• Lubricate the probe cover (or end of thermometer) with a water soluble jelly (K-Y jelly) or Vaseline for easier insertion.
• Hold the baby securely across your lap or on a firm surface – stomach down – by placing your palm against his lower back, just above his bottom.
• With the other hand, turn on the thermometer and insert tip of the thermometer no more than 1/2 inch into the baby’s rectum. Stop if it does not go in easily.
• Hold the thermometer in place with two fingers, keeping your other hand cupped around the baby’s bottom, for the length of time described in the printed instructions.

Remember
When reporting your baby’s temperature, be sure to tell the care provider how you took it (axillary, rectally, or orally) and what kind of thermometer you used.

Taking the axillary temperature (under the arm – in the armpit)
• Normal axillary temperature is about 97.6° F (36.6° C), with a range of 97° F (36.2° C) to 98.6° F (37° C).
  Fever is temperature above 99° F (37.2° C).
• Wipe baby’s armpit with a dry towel. There should not be any clothing between the arm and chest.
• Place the tip of the thermometer in the baby’s armpit and keep baby’s arm pressed firmly against his/her side.
• Hold the thermometer in place for the length of time described in the printed instructions.