Taking Temperatures in the Pharmacy

Temperatures should be taken when indicated to identify severity of illness and need for referral and to screen out patients for whom treatment is not indicated.

**Adults and Older Children:** Once a child is able to hold a thermometer under their tongue, an oral temperature can be taken. To take an oral temperature using a digital thermometer, follow these steps:

1. Make sure that the child has not had any hot or cold liquids 20-30 minutes before you take the temperature.
2. Place the thermometer under the tongue and have the child close her lips around it.
3. Keep the thermometer in position until the thermometer beeps and record the results.
4. A normal temperature using an oral thermometer is 96.8-99.5° F.

**Toddlers:** Axillary temperatures may be used in children over 3 months of age. To take an axillary temperature (under the arm) using a digital thermometer, follow these steps:

1. Place the thermometer directly under the armpit.
2. Gently fold the infant’s or child’s arm across the chest to hold the thermometer in place.
3. Keep the thermometer in position until the thermometer beeps and record the results.
4. Axillary temperatures may be 1 degree F cooler than oral temperatures. A normal temperature using an axillary thermometer is 95.8-98.5° F.

**Infants:** To take a rectal temperature using a digital thermometer in an infant, follow these steps:

1. Put lubrication (Vaseline is not recommended) on the tip of the thermometer as directed, if necessary. (K-Y™ Jelly can be used.)
2. Lay the infant on a firm surface or on your lap and place your hand over the lower back to steady him.
3. Insert the thermometer 1 inch into the anal opening and hold between the second and third finger. (Don’t push the thermometer in more than 1 inch.)
4. Keep the thermometer in position until the thermometer beeps and record the results.
5. Normal Rectal Temperature is often 1 degree F warmer than oral temperatures. A normal temperature using a rectal thermometer is 97.8-99.5° F.

**Remember:** Thermometers must be sterilized between patients. Having multiple thermometers on hand can facilitate efficiency. Read the package insert of the thermometer for directions. Often alcohol or soap and water can be used to clean thermometers.

**When to Refer:** When temperatures exceed the following for over 24 hours, patients should be prescribed and dispensed medications, and should be advised to seek treatment by an independent prescriber:

- 100.5°F in patients <1 year old
- 101° F in patients 1-17 years old
- 102° F in adults