Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust

Taking an axilla temperature

– Competency for parents and carers

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

Congratulations on the birth of your baby.

As your baby becomes more stable and you become more involved in caring for your baby in hospital you will be encouraged to participate in taking your baby's temperature.

We hope that the information in this booklet about taking your baby's temperature is useful and reassuring.

It is often difficult for babies that have been born prematurely, or who have been unwell, to regulate their own temperature. It is therefore important that we are able to monitor your baby's temperature effectively to help them to grow and thrive.

Our aim is to teach and support you in learning how to take your baby's temperature and what to do if you are worried something is wrong. Please do not worry about how long it takes you to gain your confidence. It is important that you feel at ease and are able to approach somebody if you are unsure about anything.

What is an axilla temperature?

An axilla temperature is a measurement taken from your baby's armpit and is the recommended way of routinely monitoring a baby's temperature.

On the neonatal unit, a Welch Allyn Sure Temp Plus thermometer (pictured on the front cover of this leaflet) is used to measure your baby's temperature. Your baby should have their own thermometer located in their bed space. A nurse will be happy to show you where it is kept.

You will be shown how to ensure the thermometer is in the correct mode and how to correctly measure your baby's axilla temperature.

We do not have set times for measuring your baby's temperature as this will be tailored to their needs. In collaboration with the nursing team, we will be able to make an individualised plan at the beginning of each shift. As a minimum, we must measure a baby's temperature at least once a shift but the frequency and time your baby's temperature is measured may vary, for example:

- Before and/or after care, e.g. changing your baby's nappy
- Before and/or after a procedure, e.g. a blood test
- More regularly when the thermal support given to your baby is increased/ reduced, e.g. moving your baby from an incubator to a 'hotcot'
- More regularly if your baby has been too hot or too cold.

Why is it important to monitor my baby's axilla temperature?

Without close temperature monitoring, a baby may become too hot (hyperthermic) or too cold (hypothermic) and this may have a negative effect on other body systems. It is therefore our aim to maintain a temperature between 36.7°C and 37.3°C. Both high and low temperatures can be an early indication of other illnesses e.g. sepsis, hypoglycaemia.

Premature babies are often unable to regulate their temperature. When a baby is born early their ability to regulate their own temperature is still developing and they also lack sufficient reserves in order to help achieve this without compromising other body systems.

Babies born at term are usually better able to maintain their temperature, but if they are unwell, they are more likely to need closer monitoring and support in regulating it.

Supporting your baby's thermoregulation

Thermoregulation is the term used to describe an individual's ability to maintain their temperature within a normal range (in a neonate, 36.7°C - 37.3°C).

Babies lose heat in 4 main ways:

- Conduction – the transfer of heat from one object to another e.g. your baby may become too cold if placed in a cold cot

- Convection – heat loss due to the movement of air at the skins surface e.g. your baby may become cold if they have no clothes on and are out of their cot, or in a draughty place.

- Radiation – heat lost when your baby is exposed and the surrounding surfaces are cool e.g. after your baby has a bath, has wet skin and the room is cool

- Evaporation – water loss from the skin's surface e.g. preterm babies lose water from the skin's surface due to their more immature skin development

Depending on your baby's gestation and condition, your baby will be supported to regulate their own temperature using different 'cots'. Throughout your baby's special care journey they may have many different 'beds' until they are eventually able to regulate their temperature themselves. These may include:

- Incubator – a box like structure in which your baby can be kept in a controlled environment. Nurses can control many elements such as air temperature and humidity in order to reduce the risk of heat loss.

- 'Hot-cot' – a heated mattress placed in your baby's cot to provide a warm surface which can be increased or reduced to help support your baby's temperature regulation.

- Babytherm – a larger version of a 'hot-cot' with a heated gel mattress and sometimes a built in overhead heater.

- Cot – a bassinette with a normal mattress – your baby should be regulating their own temperature at this stage with the necessary addition of blankets and clothing.

How to become involved with measuring your baby's temperature

Please read this booklet carefully and discuss any queries you may have with staff.

You will be shown how to perform an axilla temperature measurement before you are asked to participate.

Gain your confidence slowly and get your teaching plan signed off when you feel happy and confident in measuring your baby's axilla temperature. Remember there is no rush, and we are here to help you.

If you would like to be able to take your baby's temperature, please read the guide below and complete the axilla temperature competency.

Step-by-step guide to taking your baby's axilla temperature

1. Wash your hands before you start the procedure

2. Check that the thermometer in your baby's bed space is clean. Ensure that the blue ejection button (at the top of the probe) and the blue probe well (the hole the probe sits in) are intact and working properly

3. Withdraw the probe from the probe well and load a probe cover (found in the green and white box attached to the thermometer) by inserting the probe into a probe cover and pressing the probe handle down firmly

4. Ensure the thermometer is in the ‘paediatric axilla’ mode. An icon with a crawling baby with a triangle under the armpit should display on the digital screen (ask a nurse to show you how to change the mode or if you are unsure)

5. Lift your baby’s arm so that you are able to see your baby’s entire exposed armpit. Place the probe as high as you can into your baby’s armpit aligned with their spine. Do not allow the probe to come into contact with your baby’s skin before it is in the correct position as this may cause an inaccurate reading.

6. When you are happy that the probe is in the correct position, place your baby’s arm snuggly at their side. Your baby may cry but taking their temperature should not cause them any pain. Keep their arm as still as possible. ‘Walking’ segments will appear on the digital display indicating that the measurement is in progress (this should take approximately 15 seconds).

7. The thermometer will beep 3 times when the measurement is complete and the site and temperature will appear on the digital display.

8. Make a note of the temperature reading.

9. If the thermometer is unable to measure your baby’s temperature in the normal ‘paediatric axilla’ mode, it will automatically enter the monitor mode (a snail will appear on the digital display). If this occurs restart the process from step 2 or alternatively try the other armpit. If you are still having problems, don’t panic, ask a member of staff to help you.

10. After the temperature measurement is complete, remove the probe from your baby’s armpit and eject the probe cover by firmly pressing the blue ejection button on the top of the probe.

11. Return the probe to the probe well. The digital display will go blank.

12. If the reading was below 36.7°C or above 37.3°C recheck the temperature. If remains below or above what is safe for your baby tell a member of staff immediately. They will probably retake the temperature to confirm your reading and then make a plan of care with you to help your baby to achieve and maintain good thermoregulation.

Further information

If there is any part of this leaflet you do not understand or you have further questions, please ask a staff member who will help.

Competency assessment – axilla temperature

Trakcare sticker	Parent/carer 1 – Name and signature:
	Parent/ carer 2 – Name and signature:

Skill	Demo or talk – signature and date	Parent/ carer 1 practices	Parent/ carer 2 practices	Nurse assessed as competent – name, signature and date	Parents to sign and date when confident with teaching
Hygiene					
Preparation of thermometer					
Selecting the appropriate measurement site					
Taking the measurement					
Reading and reporting the measurement					
Trouble shooting					

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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