

# Medical device advice: Digital thermometers and home blood-pressure machines

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With cold and flu season in full swing, digital thermometers are a convenience for many families, but an internal medicine physician in the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine says they are not for everyone.

According to Stephen Russell, M.D., [digital thermometers](#) are accurate

for adults and children but should not be relied upon for newborns and babies.

"We don't recommend the forehead, ear or under-the-arm thermometer devices for anyone under the age of 6 months," Russell said. "A traditional rectal thermometer is what will get the accurate temperature of newborns and babies. At that age, their ear canals are a little small for the ear thermometers, and it's not best to rely on forehead or underarm thermometers because they just don't give an accurate reading on children that age."

Russell says ear, forehead and underarm thermometers are good to use for preschool and elementary-age children. However, he recommends families keep a standard mercury or digital thermometer to use in the mouth in cases when the other thermometers give extreme readings.

"The ear, forehead and under-the-arm [thermometers](#) are especially good in the midrange," Russell said. "So, when the temperature reads normal, that's very reassuring. When they read 101 or 102, that's a good indication that there is a fever. But when you start to get to extremes—like 104 or higher or 96 or lower—it's probably a good idea to use a standard mercury thermometer or in-the-mouth digital thermometer to recheck it."

Russell shares similar advice for home blood-pressure devices. The traditional arm cuff is still the preferred method for attaining an accurate reading, but the electronic finger and wrist cuffs are good to have in the home.

"If the finger and wrist cuffs are reading normal, they probably are normal," Russell said. "But anything that's abnormal—or if you're concerned the reading is too low or too high—confirm the reading at your local pharmacy. You can also purchase a traditional arm cuff to use

at home."

For those who have a regular arm cuff for home use, Russell recommends bringing it to the doctor's office annually to compare readings.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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