

# Ask the Pediatrician: Are infrared thermometers safe to use on children?

March 22 2021, by Dr. Elizabeth Murray, American Academy Of Pediatrics

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*Are non-contact thermometers unsafe to use on children?*

You may have seen the social media posts warning about the possible dangers of non-contact infrared thermometers. These devices, which are held up to a person's forehead to take his or her temperature, are being widely used in schools and [child care centers](#).

The good news is that the claims about their danger are false.

Like other types of thermometers, these devices measure the temperature of a surface. They do this by gathering the heat coming from the person (in this case, usually the person's forehead). It is the [infrared light](#) coming from the person that is being gathered by the thermometer, not infrared light being projected to the person.

Reducing shared touch points is very important in slowing the spread of COVID-19 as well as other germs, which is why touch-free devices like these are useful. They give us the information we need while lowering the risk of coming in contact with the virus.

These devices are also very quick, which allows for rapid screening of a large number of people in a relatively short period of time, such as at hospital entrances, day care centers and schools.

You may wonder how accurate these devices are. No [device](#) is perfect, of course. And while you don't need to worry about their safety, there are some concerns about how accurate these thermometers really are. Readings can be affected by clothing, drafts, direct sunlight and cold air.

Because the temperature is being measured from the child's forehead, for example, items such as winter hats or head bands can temporarily skew the results. However, this is easily corrected by reminding students to remove their hats as they enter the school or approach the building. A child's temperature can also be retaken once they're inside and warmed up.

A "normal" temperature varies with the child's age, activity, and time of day. A fever usually is a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher. This is a sign that the body is fighting an illness. Your child's temperature, age, and other signs of illness will help your doctor recommend treatment that is best for your child.

A fever is usually caused by infections from viruses (such as a cold or the flu) or bacteria (such as strep throat or some ear infections). The fever itself is not the disease, only a sign that the body's defenses are trying to fight an infection.

Call your pediatrician right away if your child:

- is 2 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, or if fever rises above 104°F (40°C) repeatedly at any age.
- looks very ill, is unusually drowsy, or is very fussy.
- has been in a hot place, such as an overheated car.
- has other symptoms, such as a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe ear pain, an unexplained rash, or repeated vomiting or diarrhea.
- has immune system problems, such as [sickle cell disease](#) or cancer, or is taking steroids.
- has had a seizure.

Even if your child's temperature is not elevated, talk with your pediatrician if you have any questions about your child's [temperature](#) and/or whether he or she might be sick.

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