

Signs of Illness in a Newborn

Asking yourself these questions may help you determine illness in your baby:

Is there a change in the baby's behavior?

- Is the baby crying more than usual? Has the tone of the cry changed?
- Is the crying at a different time of day than usual?
- Is the baby more irritable than usual?
- Is the baby sleeping more or less than usual?
- Does the baby seem lethargic or listless?

Has the baby's appetite or digestion changed?

- Is the baby eating less than usual?
- Has the baby vomited more than once? If the baby is vomiting, is the vomiting forceful? (This is called projectile vomiting.)
- Are there signs of diarrhea? That is, are the stools watery, or more runny than usual? Is it happening more frequent than usual?
- Do they have an increase in stools?
- Is the baby urinating less frequently than usual? Has the color of the urine changed?

Has there been a change in the baby's breathing?

- Does the baby seem to have trouble breathing?
- Is baby grunting?
- Is baby's nose flaring with each breath?
- Is baby's chest retracting with each breath?
- Is the baby breathing more than 60 breaths per minute?
- Does the baby sound congested?
- Does the baby have a runny or stuffy nose?
- Is the baby coughing?

How does the baby look?

- Is the baby's skin pale or flushed?
- Is there a rash anywhere on the baby's body?
- Do the baby's eyes look glassy or dull?
- Is there any discharge from the eyes?

Does the baby have a fever?

Taking baby's temperature:

Axillary (under the arm): Take one of baby's arms out of the sleeve on one side. Place the bulb end of thermometer in the armpit, and hold baby's arm snugly against the baby's side, making sure thermometer is completely covered by the skin of the armpit. Keep thermometer in place until it beeps while talking or singing to baby. A normal axillary temperature is 97.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

Rectal: In a small baby, this is the most accurate way to take a temperature. Use this technique if an axillary (under the arm) temperature is high or you are treating baby with medication for a fever. First clean thermometer with soap and water, rinse well. Lubricate the bulb end of the thermometer with petroleum jelly (Vaseline). Lay the baby, bare-bottomed and

tummy down, on your lap. As you talk or sing soothingly to the baby, spread the buttocks with one hand until you can see the anus, which opens into the rectum. With the other hand, gently slip the lubricated end of the thermometer about 1/2 inch into the rectum. If there is any resistance discontinue this method of temperature taking. Keep thermometer in until it beeps, while you sing or talk to the baby. A normal rectal temperature is 99.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

Normal body temperature is 98.6 degrees F.

Call baby's caregiver if baby's temperature is under 97.5 degrees F or over 100.4 degrees F.

Use only a digital thermometer. Ear thermometers are not accurate until your baby reaches a year in age. Thermometer strips and pacifier thermometers are not accurate. Mercury thermometers are dangerous and should not be used. If you have one, you can dispose of it at a waste disposal facility. You will receive a free digital thermometer from the hospital you birth at before you are discharged.

Any of the above changes could indicate illness. If you notice any of them, or other worrisome changes in your baby, call your baby's pediatrician. When you call the office, be prepared to describe the following:

- The signs of illness about which you are concerned; including baby's temperature.
- How long the signs have been present.
- State what you need: to have the caregiver return your call or to speak to the caregiver immediately. If you feel this is an emergency arrange for the baby to be seen as soon as possible.

If your baby has any of the following, immediately call 911 or take them to the nearest emergency room:

- Any serious accident or injury to any part of the body.
- Unconsciousness.
- Bleeding that cannot be stopped.
- Any signs of blood in the stool, black stools after the first few days.
- Sunken eyes.
- Sunken or bulging fontanel (soft spots on the baby's head) .
- Bluish or grayish skin and/or blue lips.

Your pediatrician will provide you with more information about illness, emergencies, and communicating with their office at your first visit.