OSCE checklist for axillary temperature

An OSCE checklist for axillary temperature starts with a clean, working thermometer and a dry armpit, then holds the probe in place for the full time before reading and recording. Other routes may be preferred for some patients, so say why you chose this one.

OSCE checklist for axillary temperature: steps to practise

1. Wash or rub your hands and gather the thermometer, cover or wipe, and chart.
2. Introduce yourself, confirm identity and explain. Gain consent.
3. Check the thermometer is clean, working and the right type. Fit a new cover if used.
4. Ask the patient to expose the armpit. Dry it gently if it is damp, because moisture changes the reading.
5. Place the tip in the centre of the armpit and bring the arm down across the chest to close the space.
6. Keep the thermometer still until it signals, or for the time your device requires.
7. Remove it, read the value and note the unit.
8. Record the temperature with the time and the route, written as axillary.
9. Compare with the previous values and say what you would do if the result is raised or low.
10. Dispose of the cover, clean the thermometer according to policy, wash your hands and leave the patient comfortable.

What candidates commonly forget

- Writing the route. An axillary value is not directly comparable with oral or tympanic values.
- Drying the armpit and holding the arm still.
- Saying that other routes may be preferred, depending on age and policy.
- Cleaning the device between patients.
- Acting on the number: repeat, treat or escalate.

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy. Which site and thermometer type you should use depends on the patient's age and on your country's guidance, so follow the one your exam uses. You can practise with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. See also the general OSCE nursing checklist.

Common questions

Is an axillary temperature accurate?

It is convenient, and NICE uses it for infants under 4 weeks, but it can read differently from other routes. Follow your policy on confirming abnormal readings.

How long do I keep the thermometer in?

Until your device signals, or as its instructions say. Do not guess.

Do I record the route?

Yes. Write axillary next to the value so the next nurse reads it correctly.

Sources

- NICE QS61: Infection prevention and control
- NICE NG143: Fever in under 5s

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.