

Fact Sheet

Aboriginal Otitis Media (Middle Ear Infection)



What is Otitis Media?

Otitis Media is a common childhood infection which affects the middle ear. Because of the infection, the Eustachian tube (see picture below) gets blocked and stops the airflow that keeps the middle ear healthy. If infection persists, fluid builds up in the middle ear and can become thick like glue.

What causes it?

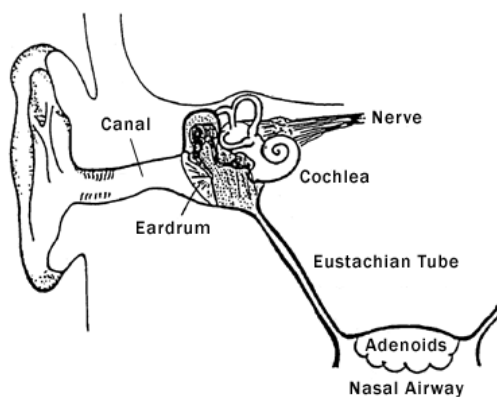
- Colds, flu and chest infections.
- Prematurity ie, being born too early.
- Smoking around children.

What reduces the rate of middle ear infections?

- Taking a shower each day, washing hands and face and washing clothes regularly.
- Good nutrition - fresh food, cutting down on "junk food".
- A bed for each child - overcrowding increases infection.

Parts of the ear

This picture shows different parts of the ear:



(Look at the glossary, at the end of this fact sheet, for the meanings of the different words in the picture and in this fact sheet.)

Who is at risk?

Otitis Media is a big problem for Aboriginal children. Many children get Otitis Media but Aboriginal children are ten times more likely to get it than non-Aboriginal children.

Some factors about Otitis Media (Middle Ear Infection)

- Otitis Media (OM) is a common childhood disease - 75% of all children have had one episode of O by the age of five and for some it may continue throughout school life.
- As many as eight out of ten Aboriginal children could have a middle ear infection and hearing loss at some time during the school year.
- Hearing loss can make things much harder at school for Aboriginal children, especially if English is a second language, and the teachers are not aware of all the problems.
- If children can't hear properly, they can't learn properly.
- A child with Otitis Media may have fluctuating hearing loss. This means that hearing loss will vary, depending on how bad the ear infection is.

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Signs of Otitis Media

Signs of Otitis Media include:

- Ear ache or pain in the ear.
- Cranky or upset or behaviour problems.
- Temperature or high fever.
- Rubbing or pulling ears.
- Not paying attention or always saying "what".
- TV must be louder.
- Doing badly at school or pre-school.
- Off balance.

How does it affect learning?

The build up of the sticky fluid makes it hard to hear. The sticky fluid in the ear can cause hearing loss. If a child cannot hear what is being said it makes it hard for them to listen. They can have trouble hearing in the classroom or at home. Because of hearing loss they can have learning problems or behaviour problems.

What can you do to help?

- Take your child for regular check-ups to help find Otitis Media.
- Breast feeding helps to protect against infection.
- Teach your child how to blow their nose so they can get rid of mucus (REMEMBER TO BLOW NOT WIPE).
- Make sure you and your children eat healthy foods.
- Try to get housing that is not over crowded - eg one child per bed.

- Don't smoke around children, in the car or in the home, because smoking makes it easier to get Otitis Media.
- Always make sure your child is seen by the doctor or nurse so you can get help for Otitis Media that may not be getting better.
- Ask for your child's hearing to be tested if he/she does not seem to be speaking or hearing properly or if he/she is not doing well at school.
- Ask for your child to see an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist if he/she does not get better quickly.
- DO NOT give baby a bottle to drink in the cot or bed.
- When feeding baby, hold his/her head in an upright position.

How can parents help the child learn to speak and listen?

- Get your child's attention before speaking and talk loudly, looking at their face so that they can see you and see your face expressions.
- Talk to your child a lot and read lots of books/stories in a quiet area so they can hear you. By caring and spending time with your child it will help them to learn.
- Let teachers or carers know that your child has a hearing problem. Ask them to be patient and help your child learn to listen.

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Glossary

Cochlea: The cochlea looks like a snail shell. It is part of the inner ear. Its job is to receive sound vibrations and turn them into messages to send to the brain.

Ear Drum: The eardrum membrane is part of the middle ear and separates the outer ear from the middle ear.

Eustachian Tube: This is a tube that goes from the middle ear to the throat. The tube does three things:

1. Let air flow through the ear to keep it healthy.
2. Drains infected fluid from the ear to the throat.
3. Stops fluid from going back into the ear from the throat.

Pinna: The outside part of the ear (the ear "flap").

Remember

- Otitis Media or Glue Ear is very common in Aboriginal children.
- Finding and treating it early is important.
- Reduce the risk by learning how to prevent it.
- Be patient, supportive and spend time with children who have Otitis Media.

For more information, please contact:
Alena Ward, Nurse Audiometrist
Community Health Centre, Goulburn,
phone (02) 4827 3229.



This fact sheet is for education purposes only.

Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on Monday 29th September, 2008.

the
children's
hospital at Westmead

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