

Facts about Ear Infections

Ear infections are common in young children. Viruses cause most ear infections. Some ear infections are caused by bacteria and can be treated with antibiotics.

You can't catch an ear infection from someone else, but illnesses, such as coughs and colds that lead to ear infections, are catching.

Some children get ear infections more often than others.

Colds and ear infections have some of the same symptoms, such as a mild to high fever and loss of interest in eating or playing.

Ear infections also cause earaches. Older children can tell you if they have an earache. Young children and babies may just become cranky and fussy or cry more than usual. They may rub or pull their ears. Children may be more cranky when they lie down.

Not every child with an ear infection will need an antibiotic. Doctors may treat children under two years of age with antibiotics. For older children, the doctor may suggest antibiotics or medicine for pain relief. Usually the doctor will want to check the ears again to make sure the infection is gone.

Decongestants and antihistamines do not help ear infections. Most ear infections are not serious.

In some children, fluid collects in the middle ear. The fluid may last for as long as three months but the child may not have a fever or even an earache. The child's hearing may be affected but, most children get better without any medical treatment. Others may need medicine or tubes in their ears to correct the hearing problem.

Hearing loss in young children may need to be treated to prevent speech and language delay.



What to Do at Home

- **Call your doctor** if you think your child has an ear infection. Your doctor will need to look into your child's ears to see if they are infected.
- If your doctor prescribes medicine for an ear infection, it is important that the child take all of the medicine prescribed by the doctor.
- **Do not give over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to a child under 6 years of age, unless your doctor tells you to.**



When to Call Your Doctor or 811

Call the doctor if your child has any of the following:

- an earache that becomes worse, even though the doctor has treated it
- a temperature of 38.5°C or higher and is less than 6 months of age
- a temperature of 38.5°C or higher for more than 72 hours
- is very cranky or fussy or cries more than usual
- has trouble breathing, or breathes very quickly
- does not respond to quiet sounds
- is vomiting
- is very sleepy or listless
- has any other signs of illness that concern you



Children with ear infections may go to the child care centre or school if they feel well enough to take part in activities.