

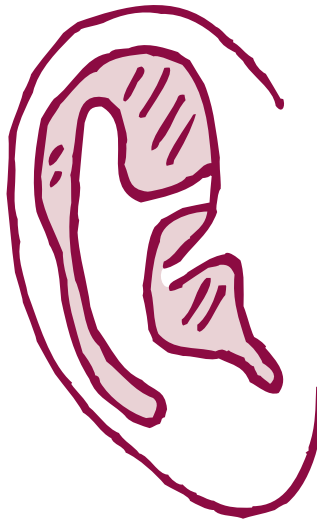
Ear Infections, Hearing Loss and Children

Ear infections are very common among young children. In fact, they are the second most common illness, next to the common cold. Almost all children will experience at least one infection before the age of three.

Ear infections are an inflammation of the middle ear, called otitis media. They usually follow colds and take one of two common forms:

- *Otitis media with effusion* (OME) is when there is a watery or mucous-like fluid (effusion) in the middle ear. This fluid can cause mild to moderate hearing loss for weeks or possibly months.
- *Acute otitis media* (AOM) is when the middle ear is infected. Pain and fever can develop rapidly and there is a pus-like fluid in the ear.

Children attending child care are more likely to have OME than children who are not in child care. OME is not considered contagious, but in child care settings children give each other colds, which increase the risk of developing OME. Adenoids and tonsil inflammations can also cause ear problems. Persistent breathing through the mouth may indicate adenoids or other nasal obstructions. Contact your family doctor if your child has an earache or a discharge from the ear. Doctors usually prescribe antibiotics and the acute symptoms (fever and earache) often clear up in two or three days.



OME rarely has any lasting medical consequences, but some children are prone to repeated infections. Other children may require an operation in which a plastic tube is inserted in the eardrum to drain the fluid. Not all children experience hearing loss when they have OME, but for those who do, language development and learning can be affected. These children may have difficulty discriminating sounds, learning grammar and hearing intonation.

Be alert to the possibility of hearing loss in children. Some symptoms are:

- turning up the volume on the TV or radio so loudly that others complain
- not speaking as well or understanding as well as other children
- missing soft or low sounds
- short attention span.

It is never too early to have your child's hearing tested. Hearing loss is often gradual and permanent loss might be prevented if detected in time.