



EAR INFECTION

What is an Ear Infection?

Ear infections occur when a cold, throat infection, or allergy causes fluid to become trapped in the middle ear. Ear infections can be internal (“otitis media”) or external (“otitis externa”). Acute ear infections occur most often in the winter. You cannot catch an ear infection from someone else, but a cold may spread among children and cause some of them to get ear infections. Most ear infections do not result in serious health problems, but an untreated ear infection or chronic fluid build up can lead to serious complications, such as impaired hearing and speech and developmental delays.

External ear infections: These are often known as “swimmer's ear” because they are frequently caused by water that remains in the ear after swimming. They can be acute (rapid duration, short onset) or chronic (long term).

Internal ear infections: These are very common in children and occur when the middle ear becomes infected and inflamed. They often occur rapidly and last a short time, and can become chronic. Babies and young children get more of these because the internal ear tubes are smaller, making it easier for germs to reach the middle ear from the nose and throat.

What causes an Ear Infection?

An Ear Infection is caused by a bacteria or a virus and often begins after a child has a sore throat, cold, or other upper respiratory infection. The germs reach the middle ear because the passages in the ears are narrower and shorter than in an adult. Causes of Ear Infections include:

- Allergies
- Colds and sinus infections
- Excess mucus and saliva produced during teething
- Infected or overgrown adenoids
- Tobacco smoke or other irritants

What are the risk factors for acute Ear Infection?

- Attending daycare (especially daycare facilities that have more than 6 children)
- Changes in altitude or climate
- Cold climate
- Exposure to smoke
- Genetic factors (susceptibility to infection may run in families)
- Not being breastfed
- Pacifier use
- Recent ear infection
- Recent illness of any type (lowers resistance of the body to infection)
- Bottle propping (fluid pools in the baby's mouth which then enters the ears)

What are the symptoms of Ear Infection?

In infants and small children it can be difficult to identify an ear infection because of their inability to tell you where it hurts. It's important to discuss a course of treatment with the child's doctor if a child shows any of these symptoms:

- cries during feeding
- pulls on her/his ear
- has a fever (above 100.4F)
- doesn't seem to hear normally
- complains of ear pain (sometimes a piercing ear pain that makes it difficult to sleep and will worsen when lying down)

What is the treatment for Ear Infection?

Ear infections may or may not be treated with oral antibiotics. Current research shows that a large number of ear infections are viral and antibiotics will not help, and can contribute to antibiotic resistance which can make treatment with antibiotics more difficult in the future. If the ear infection is diagnosed as bacterial, antibiotics will be necessary. The child's doctor may watch the symptoms to see if the pain gets better on its own. If there is no improvement with nonprescription pain relievers within 24 to 48 hours, a course of antibiotics will be necessary. Some children can have chronic ear infections and it may be necessary to have a surgical procedure where temporary tubes are inserted to drain the fluid from the middle ear.

References: [http://www.healthychildren.org.](http://www.healthychildren.org;); [www.nidcd.nih.gov.](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov); www.cdc.gov/getsmart; www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/ear-infection; www.mayoclinic.com/health/ear-infections; www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus