

Middle ear infection (acute otitis media)

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if your child develops an ear infection. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Could it be Coronavirus?

A high temperature could be a symptom of coronavirus (Covid-19)

Main symptoms

Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

What to do if you have symptoms

If you have any of the main symptoms of coronavirus:

1. **Get a test to check** if you have coronavirus as soon as possible.
2. **Stay at home** and do not have visitors until you get your test result – only leave your home to have a test.

3. Visit NHS .UK:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>

Here you will find the latest advice on symptoms, how to book a test and advice on when and how long you, your household and your 'bubble' need to isolate.

What to do if your child has symptoms of Covid

If you think your child may have Covid, you're worried about your child or not sure what to do.

For children aged 5 or over – use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service.

For children under 5 – call 111.

Useful facts

What is middle ear infection?

Behind the ear drum is a small space that's usually filled with air: the middle ear. When germs (such as viruses or bacteria) enter, for example during a cold, an infection can develop.

How dangerous is it?

In most children, it is a harmless infection that gets better by itself without any complications.

How common is it?

Middle ear infection is very common, mostly affecting children. More than half of all children suffer at least one middle ear infection by the time they're seven.

Who's affected?

Middle ear infections are more common in children who breathe in tobacco smoke, attend day care (nursery,) or who drink formula milk rather than breast milk.

What are the symptoms?

Older children usually complain of ear ache, while younger children often pull or rub their ears. It is common to get a fever, but not usually above 39°C. Other common symptoms in small children include being irritable, crying, disturbed sleep, cough, snuffly nose and poor feeding.

Does my child need antibiotics?

Most children with a mild middle ear infection will not benefit from antibiotics. Antibiotics can be useful if your child is unwell (for example high fever and/or vomiting), if they develop a leaking ear, or in children younger than 2 years who have infections in both ears.

What can I expect to happen to my child?

Symptoms: Symptoms of middle ear infection tend to develop quickly and usually last an average of four days.

Fluid leaking from the ear: A hole may form in the ear drum and cause infected thick fluid (pus) to run out of the ear. This usually relieves the pain as it reduces the pressure on the ear drum.

What can I do to help my child - now and in the future?

Giving painkillers: You can give either Paracetamol or Ibuprofen if your child is unwell or appears distressed. Do not give both at the same time unless advised to do so by a health professional. You can try the alternative medicine if your child does not respond to the first one you start with. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. Do not give Aspirin to children under the age of 16.

Keep your child cool: Avoid overdressing or underdressing your feverish child. Keep your central heating down. Tepid sponging is no longer recommended.

Fluids: Offer your child regular fluids. If you're a breastfeeding mother, offer as many feeds as she/he will take. Avoid dummies and feeding while lying flat.

Body checks: Check your child at night regularly for signs of serious illness.

When should I seek medical help?

Most ear infections are not serious and get better by themselves. Contact 111 or your GP surgery for advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- **High fever:** A body temperature over 39°C older children, particularly if aged between 3-6 months of age
- **Vomiting**
- **Not improving:** Your child is generally unwell or doesn't start to improve after four days.
- **Fluid:** Fluid leaks out of the ear.
- **SEEK URGENT ADVICE** if your child shows any of these additional symptoms: being more sleepy than usual, confusion, feeling dizzy, a stiff neck, a rash, slurred speech, seizures (fits), being sensitive to light or is aged 0-3months and has a temperature of 38°C or more.

Where can I find out more?

Visit NHS Choices (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/otitis-media/Pages/Introduction.aspx>) or

www.patient.co.uk for more information on what you can do if your child has symptoms of a middle ear infection.

Remember that your pharmacist can also assist you in assessing and treating your child's symptoms.