

REACH Mass Vol. 1 Issue 2

Fall 2001 Newsletter

REACH Mass is a three -year project to educate parents of young children and childcare providers about appropriate antibiotic use for upper respiratory infections and antibiotic resistance.

Middle Ear Infection

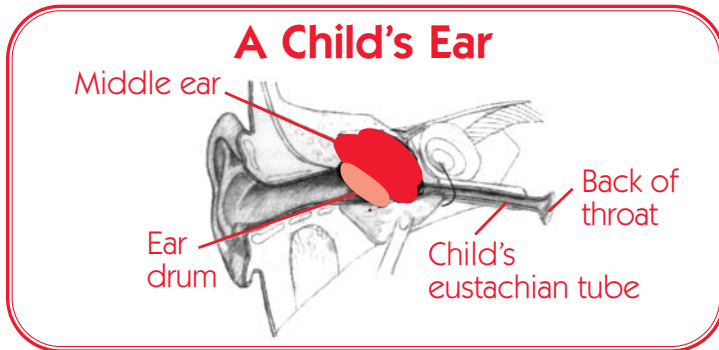
Middle ear infection (also called Acute Otitis Media) is the most frequent reason children receive antibiotics. The information below may help parents understand this condition and it's treatment.

What are the symptoms of an ear infection?

Ear infections are generally painful, as older children will usually tell you. Infants and younger children may show their pain by crying and being irritable and unable to sleep. Fever and cold symptoms may be present as well. Younger children may tug at their ear, but this may be due to earwax, irritation of the ear canal or just normal fidgeting, rather than to an infection.

What causes middle ear infections?

Middle ear infections occur when the Eustachian tube, which drains the middle ear, becomes blocked, often because of congestion from the common cold. Fluid then builds up, and bacteria and viruses can grow, causing infection.



Does fluid in the middle ear always mean infection?

No. Fluid in the middle ear during a cold does not always develop into an infection. Children may feel fullness or temporarily have slightly decreased hearing, but this does not mean an infection is present. And just because your child has been diagnosed with an ear infection when they had cold symptoms in the past, doesn't mean they have one every time they have a cold. Most ear infections start with a cold, but most colds don't end up as ear infections!

If an ear infection is present, are antibiotics always needed?

Remember, antibiotics are only useful for treating bacterial infections. Even many bacterial ear infections get better without antibiotic treatment. If the diagnosis is questionable, or the infection is mild, your doctor may decide with you that "watchful waiting" might be appropriate: he or she will treat your child with pain relievers for the first day or two, then with antibiotics only if there is no improvement.

Do antibiotics relieve the pain of ear infections right away?

No, as the infection goes away, with or without antibiotics, the pain will decrease. But this can take a few days. In the meantime, you can give your child acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil or Motrin) to ease the pain - talk with your doctor first to make sure you are using the right dose.

Respiratory Illnesses

The winter cold and flu season is fast approaching and children will be spending a lot of time in school or childcare where germs are easily spread. So, now is a great time to review some basic facts about colds, coughs, sore throats and ear infections.

Check the chart to find out which infections are usually caused by viruses (germs that cannot be treated by antibiotics) and those that are caused by bacteria (germs that can be treated by antibiotics).

Respiratory Infection	Possible Cause		Antibiotic Needed?
	Virus	Bacteria	
Bronchitis	✓		No
"Flu"	✓		No
Common cold (green/yellow mucus)	✓		No
Acute Middle Ear Infection	✓	✓	Sometimes
Sinus Infection	✓	✓	Sometimes
Sore throat (not strep)	✓		No
Strep Throat		✓	Yes

* The information represents the most common causes of and treatment for upper respiratory infections in otherwise healthy children.



Comfort Measures

Antibiotics won't treat viral infections. But when your child is miserable with a cold, there are things you can do to make your child feel better -

- Sleep is often the best medicine, so make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Have your child use a cool-mist vaporizer or use salt-water nose drops if the nose is dry or irritated.
- Give acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil or Motrin) for fever and aches as directed by your doctor or nurse.
- Use over-the-counter cold or cough medicines as directed by your doctor or nurse.
- Give your child lots of fluids to drink. Popsicles and frozen fruit juice bars are fun ways for kids to get needed fluids.
- Chicken soup and some hugs from mom or dad wouldn't hurt either!



Did You Know That...

Dark or green mucus in the nose does *not by itself* indicate a bacterial infection. In fact, mucus from the nose often changes color, usually from clear to green, during *viral* colds.

Children can get 6 to 9 viral colds each year, especially if they are in group childcare.

Colds usually last 7-10 days but can last longer.

Antibiotics will not work for viral colds.

Unnecessary antibiotic use increases the risk of antibiotic resistance in our communities.

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