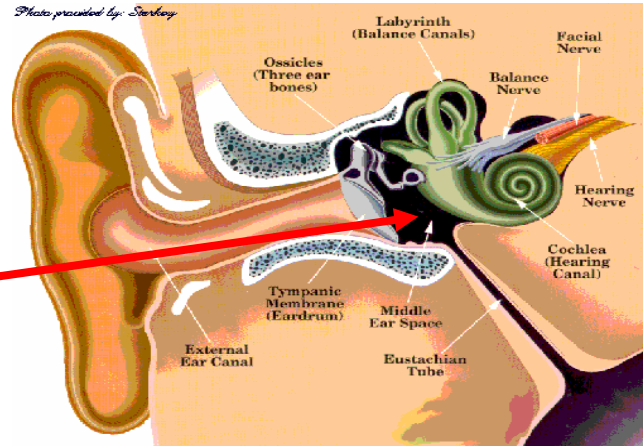


## Ear Infections (Otitis Media)

### **What is an ear infection?**

- An ear infection is also called “otitis media”.
- Ear infections are the most common reason young children visit a physician.
- An ear infection occurs when fluid builds up in the space behind the eardrum.
- It is not an infection in the ear canal, or the part you see easily.
- Once fluid fills this space, sound does not travel through the ear very well. The infection can develop quickly, making the problem worse.



### **Symptoms of an ear infection**

- A child with an ear infection may have a fever, may be irritable or fussy, may complain of pain or pull at their ear(s) or have some discharge or fluid coming out of the ear.
- However, they may not have any of these signs, depending on the child.

### **High Risk Factors for an Ear Infection**

Several factors put children at risk for ear infections:

- **Smoking:** Children who are exposed to second hand smoke are at greater risk for infections.
- **Age:** Ear infections are most common in children between ages of 0-3.
- **Daycare:** There is an increased incidence of ear infections in children who attend day care.
- **Infant feeding method:** Children who are fed formula are more at risk for infections. Breast-feeding may decrease the risk.

### **What should you do if you think your child has an ear infection?**

- See your Health Care Provider (HCP), who may advise you to wait and watch for a day or two.
- Your HCP may suggest children's Tylenol to help with pain while waiting to see if the ear infection clears on its own. Ask the HCP about this.
- Most ear infections get better on their own, without the need of antibiotics.
- If antibiotics are prescribed, make sure your child takes them all, according to instructions. Usually, an ear infection clears up on its own; but if your child is taking antibiotics, the medicine will kill the bacteria over a period of days. The weak bacteria are killed first, and the strong bacteria survive longer. If your child stops taking the antibiotics too early, only the weak bacteria will be affected. The strong bacteria will still be around and will have mutated, or learned how to deal with antibiotics. Then we get 'antibiotic resistant bacteria', the kind that medicine can't get rid of.

## Ear Infections (Otitis Media)

### ***Risks to the Child***

- An ear infection may cause temporary hearing loss, but once the infection has cleared up on its own or has been treated successfully by antibiotics, hearing loss is not usually permanent.
- The very mild hearing loss that occurs with an ear infection may delay or impede speech and language development. This usually results in an inattentive and frustrated child.
- Permanent hearing loss is not likely, but may occur in severe, untreated cases.
- If there is hearing loss, your HCP may refer your child to an Audiologist who can assess, monitor the course of the infection and may recommend myringotomy tubes (“tubes in the ears”).

### ***Communicating when your child has an ear infection***

If your child has an ear infection, he/she will become tired easily when communicating and may seem to ignore you or tune out. Here are a few things you can do:

- Make sure you have your child’s full attention when speaking.
- Speak at a normal pace--not too slow or too fast.
- Get close. The farther away you are from your child, the harder it will be for him/her to understand you.
- Inform others. Day care workers, teachers, grandparents and siblings should all be aware that your child may not always hear them. Give them tips for communicating.
- **Be kind to your child: Ears may hurt when they have an infection!**

### ***How can parents prevent ear infections?***

Many, but not all, are preventable. Many children get ear infections just as a part of growing up. However, there are a few things that parents can do to avoid and prevent some ear infections.

- **Immunize your child:** One of the regular vaccines will prevent the spread of the most common bacteria for ear infections.
- **Breastfeed your child:** This helps to build a stronger immune system in the child.
- **Smoking:** Parents should not smoke around the child and should tell others to take the smoke outside.

### ***Where can parents get more information?***

Talk to your Health Care Provider or call us at the Thunder Bay District Health Unit at 625-5900 or toll-free at 1-888-294-6630.

We have an Audiology department to help parents with information on hearing and speech. As well, we have Nutritionists, Breastfeeding Consultants and Public Health Nurses to answer your questions.



Thunder Bay District  
**Health Unit**