

Otitis Media

FACTSHEET

Ear Infection

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What is Otitis Media?

Otitis media or ear infection is usually a complication of an upper respiratory tract infection, such as the common cold. It is frequently a bacterial infection.

Who gets Otitis Media?

Otitis media is common in young children whether they attend childcare or are cared for at home. Some children appear to be more susceptible to otitis media than other children. Otitis media usually occurs in children under three years of age.

What are the symptoms of Otitis Media?

The symptoms of otitis media include inflammation of the middle ear, often with fluid building up behind the eardrum. The child may cry persistently, tug at the affected ear, have a fever, be irritable, and be unable to hear well. These symptoms may be accompanied by diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

How is Otitis Media spread?

Otitis media is not spread from person to person. It frequently occurs as a complication from an upper respiratory infection. An upper respiratory infection is spread when one person comes into contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person that have contaminated the air or an object.

Is a person with Otitis Media contagious?

No, otitis media is not spread from one person to another.

How is Otitis Media treated?

There are several antibiotics that can be used for the treatment of otitis media.

How can Otitis Media be prevented?

The best way to prevent otitis media is to prevent the development of an upper respiratory infection. To help prevent upper respiratory infections:

- Frequent, thorough hand washing
- Covering the mouth when coughing and sneezing
- Sanitary disposal of any item soiled with respiratory secretions
- Avoid crowding in living and sleeping quarters whenever possible
- Provide adequate ventilation
- Do not allow mouthing of shared toys
- Clean and disinfect toys that are shared amongst children.

Want more information?

Additional information can be provided by your health care provider. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-5842.

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