



What You Need to Know

What causes earaches?

Common colds, allergies, or second-hand smoke cause fluid to build up in the middle ear behind the eardrum. This fluid may become infected by germs (bacteria or viruses).

Does my child need an antibiotic?

Antibiotics will only help if the infection is caused by bacteria. If your child has a virus, antibiotics will not help. Using antibiotics when they are not needed can make your child more likely to become sick from resistant germs. Then the usual antibiotics may not cure the infection and stronger treatment may be needed. For example, your child may need antibiotics given by IV (by needle) in the hospital.

What if the fluid remains in the ear after an ear infection is treated?

Fluid in the middle ear is very common among infants and toddlers. This fluid usually clears up within a few months after an ear infection. If it stays longer than this, it may affect your child's hearing. If middle ear fluid is present for a long time, ask your provider about what is needed.

Does my child need to stay home?

Kids with ear infections do not need to stay home if they are feeling well. If they need to take an antibiotic at school or childcare, make sure someone can give them their medication properly.

Earache Treatment Guide

During an ear exam, your child's health care provider will look for fluid behind the eardrum and test to see if the eardrum moves in response to a puff of air. Antibiotic treatment is generally recommended if fluid is present, the eardrum does not move, and your child has one or more of the following symptoms:

- Ear pain (children often indicate this by tugging on their ear)
- Fever
- Irritability
- Bulging yellow/red eardrum

Your child's health care provider may suggest a "wait and see" approach for 48-72 hours if:

- Symptoms are mild and not complicated by other medical issues
- The eardrum has not burst
- The child is more than 24 months old



Oregon AWARE Earache Treatment Guide



Your health care provider may recommend acetaminophen (like Tylenol) for any pain. If your provider prescribes an antibiotic, make sure your child takes all the medicine as directed, even if he or she begins to feel better after a few days.