

# Health Tips for Parents

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## How are ear infections treated?

Ear infections are the most frequently diagnosed childhood illness in the United States, after the common cold. Most children will experience at least one ear infection by the time they are 3 years old.



When functioning normally, the middle-ear chamber passes air and small amounts of fluid through the Eustachian tube, which works as a pressure equalizer for the middle ear. “Respiratory problems, such as allergies or colds, may cause congestion within the tube and cause it to swell shut, leading to fluid and air build-up behind the eardrum,” says Irene Hendrickson, MD, a pediatrician at Mattel Children’s Hospital UCLA. “As pressure grows, the eardrum becomes inflamed and swollen.”



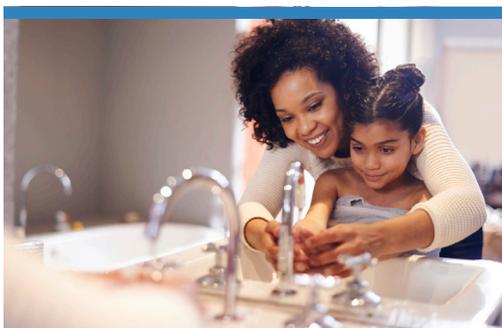
There are two common types of ear infections. Otitis externa (“swimmer’s ear”) usually occurs after swimming in fresh water lakes or chlorinated swimming pools. It affects the outer-ear canal and is usually caused by a bacterial infection. The second type, otitis media, is a middle-ear infection that occurs behind the eardrum and

is typically caused by viruses or bacteria. Your child might experience a fever and severe cases may cause a hole in the eardrum.

**Diagnosis and Treatment.** To diagnose otitis media, your physician will examine the ear and look for evidence of fluid or inflammation in the middle ear. Many middle-ear infections are viral and often resolve without treatment. Viral infections are treated based on your child’s symptoms, with acetaminophen or ibuprofen typically suggested for pain and fever control. For infections that turn into bacterial infections, physicians may prescribe a 10-day course of antibiotics. While most ear infections “heal without leaving a trace,” Dr. Hendrickson says, “very severe infections causing permanent damage to the eardrum or the ossicles could potentially cause hearing loss.” For chronic cases, when fluid is trapped in the child’s middle ear for three consecutive months, a surgical procedure to place ear drainage tubes may be considered.

Signs and symptoms of ear infection may include:

- Moderate to severe ear pain
- Fever
- Irritability
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fluid leaking from the ear
- Hearing difficulties in affected ear



## Preventive Care

“To minimize the risk of infection, children should wash their hands and faces frequently and avoid contact with people exhibiting viral symptoms,” says Dr. Hendrickson. “Exercise and having a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables will also provide vitamins and nutrients the body needs to protect itself.”