



Ear health

December 2018

Having healthy ears and good hearing is important for children's overall physical, social and emotional development.

Middle ear infections (known as Otitis Media or OM) are a common childhood illness in Australia, particularly for Aboriginal children. Middle ear infections are not always easy to detect as often children can appear well. However, children with middle ear disease, even if it is intermittent, can experience hearing loss. This in turn, can affect many areas of children's lives including speech and language development, behaviour and social connections, education and emotional wellbeing.

There are a number of things that can help to reduce the amount of ear disease children may experience. In addition, by being aware of the signs of ear disease and having ears and hearing checked regularly, speech and language development can be enhanced.

Health messages

- > Conduct regular ear and hearing checks;
 - Because ear disease is often 'silent' and can be difficult to recognise, children should have their ears checked every time they see a health worker, nurse or doctor.
 - If parents or other carers are concerned about their child's hearing or language development, it is best to rule this out with a hearing test.
- > Be familiar with the symptoms of ear disease – but remember some children will have ear disease with no symptoms;
 - Signs of a cold, pulling ears, fever, runny fluid or pus in the ear, difficulty hearing, not eating, diarrhoea or vomiting.
- > Encourage children to keep their faces and hands clean – especially when they have colds;
 - Wash hands and faces regularly.
- > Ensure children are able to eat healthy foods like fruit and vegetables which are full of essential vitamins and minerals.

- > Help support children and families to get all their vaccinations;
 - Check vaccinations when they are getting their ears checked.
- > Encourage children to blow their nose (put tissue in bin and wash their hands).
- > Breastfeeding babies helps to fight infection, including middle ear infections.
- > Reduce children's exposure to tobacco smoke.
- > Don't stick anything in children's ears – unless recommended by a health worker, nurse or doctor.

Examples of practical actions

- > Partner with or promote your local Health Service to facilitate regular ear health checks.
- > Organise 'The Aboriginal Ear Health Promotion Training Program' for your staff.
- > Display and distribute 'ear health' promotion material;
 - For example, the Department of Health's 'Care for Kids Ears' resources.
- > Organise or attend community events;
 - Use these opportunities to display and distribute 'ear health' promotion material and generate conversations about enhancing ear health for Aboriginal children.



For more information

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