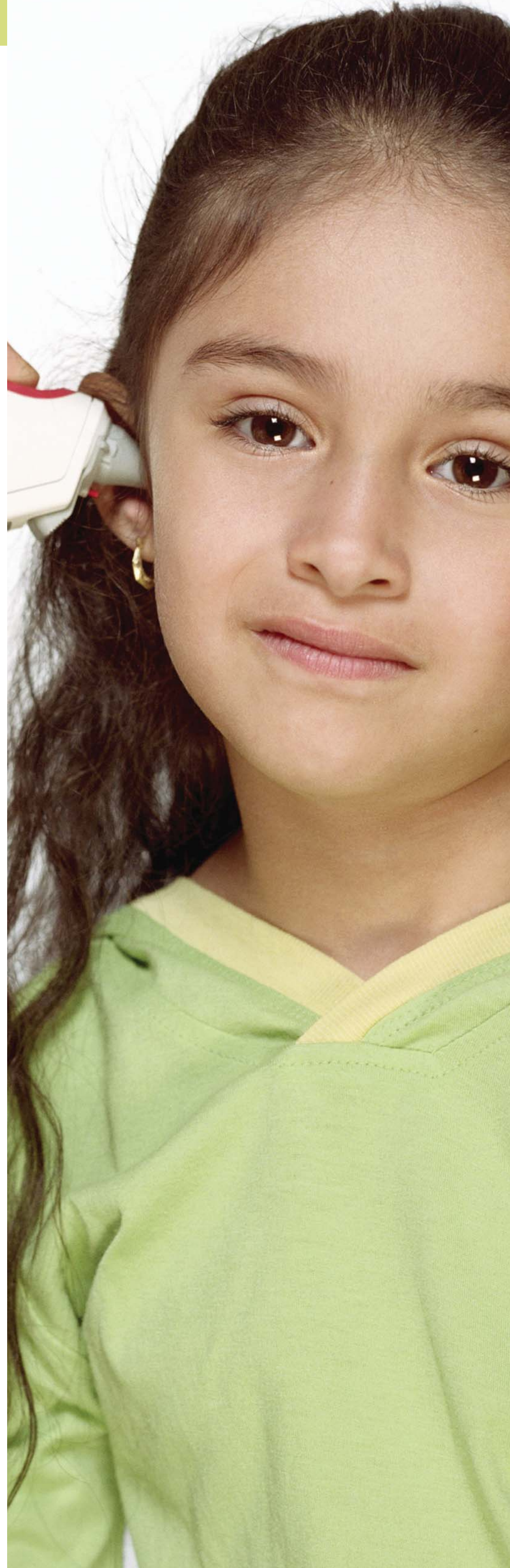


Now Hear This!

A Guide to Ear Infections

Plan Logo

Health Information



What causes ear infections?

Children don't "catch" ear infections from other people. Instead, they develop ear infections from the same germs that give them stuffy noses and coughs.

How do ear infections form?

The middle ear connects to the back of the nose by the "eustachian tube."

In babies and small children, this tube is shorter and less slanted than in adults, so it's easy for bacteria to get from the nose and throat up to the middle ear. When your child has a cold, germs can travel into the middle ear and get trapped.

As your child grows, the tube gets longer and steeper, so germs have to travel "uphill" to reach the middle ear. This is the main reason children outgrow ear infections.

Why do they hurt so much?

Because trapped fluid causes swelling and puts pressure on the eardrum. Common symptoms of ear infections include:

- Cold symptoms
- Not wanting to lie down
- Ear pain or hearing loss
- Fever
- Fussiness
- Waking during the night

Fluid in the middle ear

Fluid in the middle ear ("otitis media with effusion") is a type of ear infection young children often get. This ear infection usually doesn't hurt children and almost always heals on its own. **It doesn't need to be treated with antibiotics unless it lasts for a few months and is causing decreased hearing in both ears.**

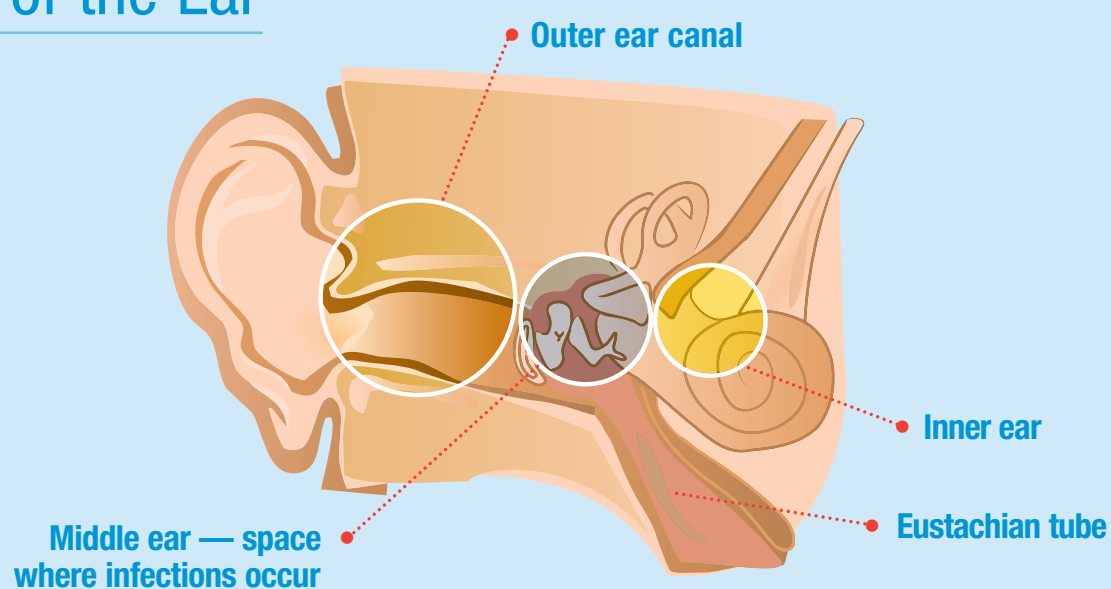
Acute ear infections

Some children get ear infections ("acute otitis media") when trapped fluid is infected with bacteria in the middle ear. Antibiotics usually help this type of infection. Sometimes your doctor might wait to see if the infection gets better on its own before giving a prescription. Always give the antibiotic to your child for as long as the doctor tells you to, even if your child feels better, or the infection could come back.

Avoiding frequent antibiotic use

Your doctor knows the best treatment for your child. Experts agree that antibiotics should not be used unless absolutely needed. Taking a lot of antibiotics can make it harder to treat future infections.

Parts of the Ear



It's important to always follow your doctor's instructions. The health information on this poster is not a substitute for medical care. If you have any questions after reading this poster, please talk to your doctor or your healthcare professional.

This material is sponsored by Abbott Laboratories to help the public learn more about the appropriate use of antibiotics.