Otitis Media
Information Booklet for Health Professionals

Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

care for kids' ears
strong hearing strong start
Care for Kids’ Ears resources are based on the Recommendations for Clinical Care Guidelines on the Management of Otitis Media in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations (updated 2010), prepared by the Darwin Otitis Guidelines Group in collaboration with the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) Otitis Media Technical Advisory Group, for OATSIH, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, ACT.

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Welcome

The Australian Government’s *Care for Kids’ Ears* campaign is part of a broader program of activities in eye and ear health to improve educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The campaign aims to help reduce the incidence of otitis media (OM) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by increasing awareness, highlighting risk factors and promoting the importance of seeking and following treatment to prevent loss of hearing.

Otitis media is a significant problem in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Some studies suggest that up to 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities present with otitis media.

Health professionals working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are well placed to pass on key ear health messages to parents and carers. To assist with this, a *Care for Kids’ Ears* resource kit for health professionals has been developed.
How to use the kit for health professionals

1. *Consultation tool* – share this quick reference guide to otitis media with parents and carers during a consultation.

2. *Poster* – display in the waiting room.

3. *Brochures* – display in the waiting room and distribute to parents and carers following a discussion of otitis media.

4. *Stickers* – give these out as a fun reward to children who have had their ears checked.

A child ear model* showing inflammation and simulated fluid in the middle ear is available on request (free of charge).

*Limited supplies available
What health professionals can do to help

Health workers, nurses and doctors working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can help reduce the prevalence of otitis media by:

• always checking children’s ears whenever they visit the clinic (even if they are there for another reason) and encouraging families to follow their advice about treatments;
• helping to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of otitis media;
• helping to raise awareness that children can have otitis media with no symptoms;
• explaining the link between otitis media and hearing loss;
• explaining the impact hearing loss can have on children, especially the significant long-term impact on language and learning;

"Kids' ears should be checked every time they're at the clinic. If they're coming in for an immunisation, a chest infection, or even a splinter on their toe – check their ears.

A quick 10 minute test can make all the difference. It's impossible to underestimate the importance of kids' hearing."

Sandi Nelson – Ear & Hearing Health Worker, NT
• helping parents and carers to realise that otitis media and hearing loss are not normal; and
• helping to convey the importance of the key prevention messages of:
  • regular ear examinations/surveillance
  • treating early infections to completion
  • not smoking around children
  • good hygiene
  • breastfeeding
  • good nutrition.
Why ear health is important

Health professionals can help parents and carers understand why children will have a stronger start in life if their hearing is strong.

With strong hearing children are more likely to:

• learn language and speech;
• learn to read and write;
• listen to family stories and music;
• feel part of their family and community;
• talk and play with family and friends;
• do well at school;
• play sport;
• understand what’s going on around them;
• stay safe because they hear instructions and warnings;
• have good self-esteem; and
• have better long-term education and employment opportunities.
Left untreated, otitis media can lead to hearing loss and medical complications.

Long-term otitis media can result in mild to moderate hearing loss which can impact on a child’s speech, language acquisition and learning, as well as affect social, physical and emotional development. Severe otitis media can result in permanent hearing loss.

In some cases otitis media can become life threatening by causing meningitis and brain abscesses.
Key messages

- Otitis media is serious.
- Otitis media can cause hearing loss.
- Otitis media can show no symptoms.
- It is important for children to have their ears checked regularly and to follow the health professional's advice about treatments.
- Otitis media can be prevented and treated.
- Hearing problems can have a lifelong impact on children.
- Prompt treatment can prevent permanent damage.
Related resources

Recommendations for Clinical Care Guidelines on the Management of Otitis Media in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations (updated 2010).

Guidelines' kit includes:

• Otitis media key messages poster
• Pocket guide for the diagnosis and management of ear disease
• Otitis media algorithms
• Flyer outlining what’s new in the 2010 update
• Practical treatment plans brochure.

www.health.gov.au

The EarInfoNet website is a ‘one stop shop’ for people working, studying or interested in otitis media and hearing loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

www.earinfonet.org.au

Ear health (EarInfoNet)

Artist: Norma Benger Chidanpee
More information

If you require further information about the Care for Kids’ Ears campaign, please visit www.careforkidsears.health.gov.au or contact:

Department of Health and Ageing
Telephone: (02) 6289 1555
Email: careforkidsears@health.gov.au

For more details, please visit
www.careforkidsears.health.gov.au

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