Otitis Media
Information Booklet for Health Professionals

Australian Government
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 Indigenous Health Division for the Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, ACT.

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Welcome

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

The resources aim 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.

An ear model* that shows outer, middle and inner ear anatomical features 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
  • g
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

- 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

Otitis Media Guidelines
The Otitis Media Guidelines provide information to assist primary health professionals to deliver comprehensive, effective and appropriate care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience otitis media. And now you can download the Otitis Media Guidelines App on Apple and Android!

PLUM and HATS
The Parent-evaluated Listening and Understanding Measure (PLUM) and the Hear And Talk Scale (HATS) ear health screening questionnaires have been developed to support health professionals, teachers, and early childhood professionals to work with parents to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-5 years who may be at risk of hearing and communication issues.

The PLUM and HATS reveal early signs of hearing difficulty and hindered language development, and provide the foundation for early intervention. The PLUM and HATS are suitable for use in any language.

HealthInfoNet
HealthInfoNet shares and exchanges evidence-based, quality-assured research to support people who work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, including in ear and hearing health.
More information

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

Department of Health
Email: careforkidsears@health.gov.au

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

All information in this publication is correct as at September 2020