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Ear infections are one of the most common childhood illnesses. They can be very painful, BUT they are not usually serious. They rarely need immediate medical attention. You can usually wait until the next day to call your child's medical home — his/her doctor's office.

When should I suspect my child has an ear infection?

- Complaints of pain, pressure or clogged ear
- Tugging at the ear
- A fever above 100.4° F
- Increased fussiness
- Hard time sleeping
- Not eating as much
- Hard time hearing
- Pain with swallowing or drinking a bottle

How to treat an ear infection:

- Give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- NEVER give ibuprofen to a child less than 6 months old
- Apply a cold or warm pack to the ear
- Use numbing drops

How to use numbing drops:

- Have your child lie down with the painful ear up
- Pull the ear lobe up and back, and fill the ear canal with the drops
- Use every 1 to 2 hours, as needed
- Your child should feel some relief within 5 to 10 minutes

Do NOT use numbing drops if your child:

- Is younger than 6 months old, unless directed by your doctor
- **Has ear tubes**
- **Has pus draining from the ear**
- Has had an allergic reaction to antipyrine or benzocain
- Do NOT use with other ear drop medications
- Do NOT use if the ear drops look brown or cloudy
- Do NOT use if the container has been open for 6 months

Most ear infections are not emergencies and do not need to be treated right away.

Your child can usually wait to be seen at his/her medical home the next day. Your child's doctor can provide better overall care for repeat ear infections and can focus on prevention.

There are times when you should call your doctor right away. Call if your child has any of these symptoms:

- A stiff neck or cannot touch the chin to the chest
- A hard time breathing
- Sluggish or looks very sick
- Dehydrated
- Severe ear pain, even after using a pain reliever and numbing ear drops
- A fever of 105° F or, if your child is less than 2 months old, a fever of 100.4° F or higher