

# Deadly Ears

Helping little people  
to hear, talk, learn and play

## Middle ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Strong hearing is very important in early childhood. Having healthy ears and strong hearing helps children to talk, listen, play and learn. Middle ear disease – also known as otitis media – is an infection or inflammation of the middle ear.

Ear infections are a very common childhood illness which can affect children's hearing. If ear infections occur frequently, or if they last a long time, the hearing loss can impact on a child's learning and development.



Australia is the only nation with a rate of chronic suppurative otitis media higher than 6 per cent



10 times higher

Duration of middle ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- **greater severity** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience the most severe forms of the disease.
- **persistence** – the disease lasts for longer periods of time.

Middle ear disease can lead to temporary mild-moderate hearing loss which can last for several weeks or months at a time.

This can affect childhood development, in areas such as speech, behaviour, play, language and learning. In some severe cases this can lead to permanent hearing loss.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children currently have one of the highest rates of middle ear disease in the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a significantly different experience of middle ear disease than most non-Indigenous Queenslanders.

Middle ear disease is characterised by:

- **earlier onset** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies and infants acquire the disease at a younger age.
- **higher frequency** – disease occurs often and repeatedly.



### Contact us

- ✉ PO Box 5492, West End QLD 4101
- t 07 3310 7709 or 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- w [www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/deadly-ears](http://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/deadly-ears)
- f [www.facebook.com/DeadlyEars](https://www.facebook.com/DeadlyEars) #DeadlyEars

## What to do

1. If you are worried about a child's ears or hearing talk to their parent and/or carer.
2. Encourage the child's parent and/or carer to take them to a local health centre to have their ears checked.
3. If you would like further information about supporting children with conductive hearing loss in the classroom please refer to our *Support strategies for children with fluctuating conductive hearing loss* fact sheet which can be found in the resources section of our website: [www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/deadly-ears-resources](http://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/deadly-ears-resources)



## How to keep ears healthy

- Encourage children to wash their hands and faces regularly.
- Ensure children eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Encourage parents and carers to make sure children get all their vaccinations.
- Get children to blow their nose, then wash their hands.
- Breastfeeding helps babies fight disease, encourage parents if they can, to do so for as long as possible.
- Avoid smoking cigarettes around children.

For further information please visit our Facebook page or website (see below).



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