Foreign body in the ear – Emergency management – Flowchart

Child presents to ED with foreign body in ear

Button battery suspected?

Removal not urgent

Criteria for ENT referral? (Box A)

Single attempt at removal (see Guideline for possible methods)

Successfully removed and no significant trauma?

- Manage concurrent otitis externa as per Otitis externa guideline
- No evidence for prophylactic use of antimicrobial drops if minor trauma to the external auditory canal. Consider only if mucosal breach (see Guideline)

Discharge home with advice re potential complications and accident prevention

Refer to ENT service.

Urgent referral to ENT

Urgent removal required to prevent tissue necrosis

- Keep NBM
- Targeted facial X-ray if cannot be directly visualised (contact RSQ to arrange transfer for X-ray if no on-site X-ray)

Yes

No

Box A: Criteria for referral to ENT

Refer the following foreign bodies to ENT (do not attempt removal in ED):
- potentially penetrating
- impacted in medial external auditory canal
- next to tympanic membrane (especially if smooth or spherical)
- multiple failed attempts at removal prior to ED

Consider seeking senior emergency/ENT advice as per local practices

Refer to onsite/local ENT as per local practices. Contact CATCH on (07) 3068 4510 if no local ENT service

Refer to ENT (onsite or via Retrieval Services Queensland (RSQ) on 1300 799 127) for urgent removal

For more information refer to CHQ-GDL-60021 – Foreign body in the ear – Emergency management