

Guidance for Pharmacy Staff – Acute Otitis Media

What is acute otitis media (AOM)?

Acute otitis media (ear infection) is very common, particularly in children. It often resolves within 3 days, but sometimes treatment may be needed.

Symptoms may include those listed in the Patient Checklist.

If the patient is eligible for the Pharmacy First service, the pharmacist will recommend the most suitable treatment option following a consultation.

Self-care key points:

- Use pain relief if appropriate, e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen
- A warm or cold flannel may help relieve ear discomfort
- Encourage rest and fluids
- Follow safety-netting advice
- Some patients may require antibiotics following pharmacist assessment

3-step guide for pharmacy teams

Step 1 – Safety first

Before you provide the patient with the Patient Checklist to complete, first check for any red flag symptoms which may indicate serious illness (e.g. meningitis).

- Non-blanching rash
- Drowsiness
- Neck stiffness
- Sensitivity to light
- Facial nerve paralysis



Signpost to A&E or call 999 if severe.

Step 2 – Ask patient to complete checklist

Ask the patient, parent or guardian to complete the Acute Otitis Media Patient Checklist prior to consultation with the pharmacist.

Ensure privacy and support where needed.



Step 3 - Patient checklist guidance – route correctly

Once the completed checklist is returned to you, use the following guidance on appropriate next steps.



If...	Do...
There are any ticks in Section 1	They are not eligible for the Pharmacy First service. Advise the patient to seek treatment from their GP or out of hours service.
There are any ticks in Section 2	Refer to the pharmacist. The patient may need urgent onward referral.
There are any ticks in Section 3	Refer to the pharmacist. The patient will require an otoscopic examination. This may result in: Self-care advice Referral Over-the-counter sale PGD supply

Supporting patients at the counter (make every conversation count)

Earache (child): “We can help with this today — I’ll get the pharmacist to take a look.”

Parent unsure: “Let’s get the pharmacist to assess this — we may be able to treat it here.”

General: “I’ll ask the pharmacist to check this for you — they’ll decide the best next step.”

Patient Checklist — AOM

You are being asked to complete this checklist as you have presented in the pharmacy wishing to access management for symptoms of an ear infection for either yourself or a child in your care.

Please answer these questions carefully as this will help our colleagues to ensure you receive the most appropriate care.

Please be assured our staff will treat this information confidentially.

Please tick if you or the child being treated:

Name: _____ DOB: ____/____/____ Date: ____/____/____

Section 1 — Not eligible for Pharmacy First

☐	Is under the age of 1 or over the age of 17 years
☐	Has had 3 or more episodes of an ear infection in the last 6 months, or 4 or more in the last 12 months
☐	Is under the age of 16 and is pregnant, or there is a chance they may be pregnant

Section 2 — Refer to Pharmacist

☐	Has pain, soreness, swelling or tenderness behind the affected ear(s)
☐	Has a severe headache
☐	Has a headache behind or around the eyes
☐	Is confused or irritable
☐	Has developed any muscle weakness

Section 3 — Symptoms

☐	In older children: Earache
☐	In younger children: Holding, tugging, or rubbing of the ear
☐	Generally unwell e.g. fever, crying, poor feeding, restlessness, runny nose or cough