

Pharmacy First: Acute Otitis Media

NICE CKS AOM | NHS England Pharmacy First PGDs 7a/7b v1.1 (Oct 2025)

REFER NOW: Red Flags

- Mastoiditis: pain, swelling, or tenderness BEHIND the ear: A&E; urgently
- Meningitis: neck stiffness, photophobia, mottled skin: A&E; urgently
- Intracranial abscess: severe headache, confusion, muscle weakness: A&E; urgently
- Facial nerve palsy: drooping of the face: A&E; urgently
- Temperature above 39 degrees Celsius: refer to GP or NHS 111. Do not treat.
- Bloody ear discharge: possible cancer: refer to GP urgently

Sepsis signs: call 999. Do not supply antibiotics or ear drops if any red flag is present.

Presentation	Treatment	Notes
Under 2 years, BILATERAL AOM, symptoms more than 3 days OR severe	Amoxicillin (PGD 7b)	Most common group needing antibiotics
ANY age: AOM with otorrhoea (ear discharge from perforation)	Amoxicillin (PGD 7b)	Do NOT use ear drops if eardrum is perforated
Moderate-severe pain, oral analgesia insufficient, intact eardrum	Otigo ear drops (PGD 7a)	Stop drops if discharge develops
All other presentations (most children)	Watchful waiting	Paracetamol or ibuprofen by weight. Review in 3 days.

CHECK: Before Supplying

- Age 1 and over, under 18 (under 1: refer. 18 and over: outside pathway)
- Confirm AOM on otoscopy: red/cloudy/bulging tympanic membrane, or perforation with discharge
- Not recurrent AOM (3+ episodes in 6 months or 4+ in 12 months with one in last 6)
- Not high-risk child (heart, lung, kidney, liver disease; cystic fibrosis; premature)
- Check penicillin allergy before supplying amoxicillin

Age	Dose	Penicillin allergy
1 to 4 years	250mg three times daily x5 days	Clarithromycin by weight (BNFc)
5 to 17 years	500mg three times daily x5 days	Clarithromycin by weight (BNFc)

Key reminders: Most children recover within 3 days without antibiotics. Amoxicillin is THREE times daily for AOM, not twice. Ear drops are excluded if the eardrum is perforated. Decongestants and antihistamines do not help. Dose paracetamol and ibuprofen by weight, not age alone. Safety net: return if not improving in 3 days, or seek urgent help if swelling behind the ear or new facial drooping develops.