

# Facts About “Swimmer’s Ear”

## What is Swimmer’s Ear?

Swimmer’s ear (also known as otitis externa) is an infection of the outer ear canal. Symptoms of swimmer’s ear usually appear within a few days of swimming and include:

- Itchiness inside the ear.
- Redness and swelling of the ear.
- Pain when the infected ear is tugged or when pressure is placed on the ear.
- Pus draining from the infected ear.

Although all age groups are affected by swimmer’s ear, it is more common in children and can be extremely painful.

## How is Swimmer’s Ear Spread in the Places we Swim?

Swimmer’s ear can occur when water stays in the ear canal for long periods of time, providing the perfect environment for germs to grow and infect the skin. Germs found in pools and other places we swim are one of the most common causes of swimmer’s ear.

Swimmer’s ear cannot be spread from one person to another.

If you think you have swimmer’s ear, consult your health care provider. Swimmer’s ear can be treated with antibiotic ear drops.

## Is There a Difference Between a Childhood Middle Ear Infection and Swimmer’s Ear?

Yes. Swimmer’s ear is not the same as the common childhood middle ear infection. If you can wiggle the outer ear without pain or discomfort then your ear condition is probably not swimmer’s ear.

## How Do I Protect Myself and My Family?

To reduce the risk of swimmer’s ear:

**DO** keep your ears as dry as possible.

- Use a bathing cap, ear plugs, or custom-fitted swim molds when swimming.

**DO** dry your ears thoroughly after swimming or showering.

- Use a towel to dry your ears well.
- Tilt your head to hold each ear facing down to allow water to escape the ear canal.
- Pull your earlobe in different directions while the ear is faced down to help water drain out.
- If there is still water left in ears, consider using a hair dryer to move air within the ear canal.
  - » Put the dryer on the lowest heat and speed/fan setting; hold it several inches from the ear.

**DON’T** put objects in the ear canal (including cotton-tip swabs, pencils, paperclips, or fingers).

**DON’T** try to remove ear wax. Ear wax helps protect your ear canal from infection.

- If you think that the ear canal is blocked by ear wax, consult your health care provider.

**CONSULT** your health care provider about using ear drops after swimming.

- Drops should not be used by people with ear tubes, damaged ear drums, outer ear infections, or ear drainage (pus or liquid coming from the ear).

**CONSULT** your health care provider if you have ear pain, discomfort, or drainage from your ears.

**ASK** your pool/hot tub operator if disinfectant and pH levels are checked at least twice per day—hot tubs and pools with proper disinfectant and pH levels are less likely to spread germs.

**USE** pool test strips to check the pool or hot tub (or spa) yourself for adequate disinfectant and pH levels.



### GENERAL PUBLIC

For more information on how to help prevent swimmer’s ear, visit [www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/illnesses/swimmers-ear-prevention-guidelines.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/illnesses/swimmers-ear-prevention-guidelines.html)

For more tips on what you can do to help prevent the spread of germs at your swimming facility, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/protection/triple-a-healthy-swimming.html>

### POOL AND HOT TUB OPERATORS

For guidelines and resources on how to prevent germs from contaminating the water, visit [www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/audience-aquatics-staff.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/audience-aquatics-staff.html)



[www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/illnesses/swimmers-ear.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/illnesses/swimmers-ear.html)



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