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YOUR HEALTH 5 things . . .

5 things . . . to know about ear infections

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1 The season: Ear infections are most common during cough/cold season from October-March, when fluid lingering in the ear after a cold or flu becomes infected with bacteria or a virus, says Dr. Jerome Klein, professor of pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine.

2 Symptoms: Common signs of an ear infection include fever, irritability, rubbing the ear, decreased hearing and fluid coming out of the ear, Klein says.

3 Watch, wait: Fluid that doesn't bother children and goes away on its own does not have to be treated with antibiotics, unless it lasts for a few months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

4 Detection: EarCheck Middle Ear Monitor is an over-the-counter gadget that can detect and track middle-ear fluid. It rates ear fluid on a scale of 1-5, with level 1 indicating an infection is unlikely and levels 3-5 indicating a high likelihood of infection, in which case a pediatrician should be consulted. More info: earcheck.com.

5 Prevention: Some ear infections may be prevented by practicing good home hygiene, such as frequent hand-washing; enrolling your child in day-care programs that house fewer children; maintaining immunizations; and breast-feeding.

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