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From the PHS

R_x for otitis media: Watch and wait

Physicians treating children with otitis media with effusion should wait before prescribing antibiotic treatment. This "watchful waiting" first-line approach was recommended by a 19-member panel of nonfederal healthcare experts, convened by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), part of the US Public Health Service.

These guidelines are intended for children aged 1 to 3 years who have no craniofacial or neurologic abnormalities or sensory deficits and who are generally healthy, except for having otitis media. The panel made its recommendations based largely on the fact that otitis media often clears up without medication within 3 to 6 months. Similarly, antibiotic therapy during the early course of otitis media often produces such side effects as diarrhea and rashes and yet is only 14% more effective than "watchful waiting" in curing the infection. Furthermore, with persistent bouts of ear infections and the subsequent use of antibiotic therapy, children are likely to develop an immunity to most antibiotic drugs over time.

Should the otitis media persist beyond 3 months, however, antibiotic therapy is warranted. Surgery may also be necessary.

The complete guidelines, *Otitis Media With Effusion in Young Children*, are available free of charge from the AHCPR Publications Clearinghouse, OME/AAP, PO Box 8547, Silver Spring, MD 20907, or by calling (800) 358-9295.