The Audiologist can also recommend necessary follow-up with your family physician, pediatrician or ear, nose, and throat specialist if medical management is required.

• Call your local hospital, preschool speech and language program or children’s treatment centre for information about Audiology services in your area.

• Check your local telephone directory for listings of Audiologists

• Contact The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA) at 416-920-3676 or 1-877-740-6009 for the names of Audiologists in private practice in your area.

A Speech-Language Pathologist Can Help

• If you think your child may have delayed speech and language skills as a result of hearing difficulties, contact a Speech-Language Pathologist

• For information regarding Speech-Language Pathology services in your area, contact your local preschool speech and language program, children’s treatment centre, public health unit, Community Care Access Centre, school, or hospital

• Call OSLA at 416-920-3676 or 1-877-740-6009 for the names of Speech-Language Pathologists in private practice in your area.
What is Otitis Media?

Otitis Media refers to an inflammation of the middle ear. The middle ear is located just behind the eardrum. There are two main types of Otitis media. 

*Acute Otitis media* is the presence of fluid in the middle ear with signs and symptoms of an infection such as pain, fever and reduced hearing. *Otitis media with effusion* is the presence of fluid in the middle ear with no definite signs or symptoms of an infection other than reduced hearing.

The highest incidence of Otitis media is in children under the age of three. In addition, at least 75% of children will have at least one episode of Otitis media by the age of six. The common cold is the only other illness that occurs more frequently in young children.

Otitis media is the most common cause of temporary conductive hearing loss in children. Conductive hearing loss is hearing loss due to outer and/or middle ear problems.

What Causes Otitis Media?

Otitis media is often associated with an upper respiratory infection (such as the common cold), a sinus infection or enlarged adenoids. A cold or sinus infection can cause swelling and a narrow opening of the Eustachian tube. Similarly, enlarged adenoids may block the opening of the Eustachian tube. The Eustachian tube provides a passageway between the middle ear and the back of the throat. It helps drain fluid from the middle ear and helps to balance air pressure in the ear.

However, when the Eustachian tube is blocked, a vacuum occurs in the middle ear. Fluid is then pulled from surrounding areas into the middle ear. This build-up of fluid may restrict the travel of sound through the ear and cause a hearing loss.

Symptoms of Otitis Media

Children may react differently to the presence of Otitis media. Some may cry, pull at their ears, have a fever, be irritable, have difficulty sleeping, demonstrate a delay in speech and language development, and/or have difficulty hearing. Additional symptoms that may be present include diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

Other children may not have any of these signs or symptoms.

Why are Children so Susceptible to Otitis Media?

Children are particularly at risk because of their immature immune system response, an increased incidence of upper respiratory infections, and the fact that their Eustachian tubes are shorter, more horizontal and more movable in comparison to adults. These factors increase the risk that the Eustachian tube will become blocked.

Other Risk Factors

Children with a cleft palate or with Down Syndrome tend to experience Otitis media more frequently than other children, due to the shape of their faces. Children who are passively exposed to cigarette smoke or who have allergies may be more susceptible to middle ear infections.

How is Otitis Media Treated?

Otitis media is often treated with medication. If this is not effective, an ear, nose, and throat surgeon may create, while the child is under anesthetic, a small slit in the ear drum and insert a ventilation tube into the new opening. This will help drain any fluid that is present and restore balance in pressure across the eardrum.

Are There any Permanent Effects from Chronic Otitis Media?

Children who have chronic Otitis media (the presence of fluid which persists for three months despite medical treatment) may experience some damage to the middle ear structures. This damage may result in permanent hearing loss.

Chronic Otitis media can occur as speech, language and listening skills are developing. Children’s speech and language development is facilitated by listening and interacting with others. If a child’s hearing is reduced, their speech, language and listening skills may be significantly affected.

Who Can Help?

An Audiologist Can Help

- If you suspect that your child had difficulty hearing, consult an Audiologist. The Audiologist can assess your child’s hearing to determine the presence, type and extent of hearing loss. Early detection and follow-up are important for all children – including newborns and infants.