

Swim teachers, coaches and life savers should consider integrating these practices as standard procedure.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN
WATER SPORTS



**MANAGING EAR
CONDITIONS IN
YOUNG CHILDREN
AROUND OPEN
WATER**

REMEMBER:
ADULT
SUPERVISION AT ALL TIMES

Ear conditions are common in young children, particularly 'glue ear,' and here are some tactics and tips for managing children in open water environments.

Understanding Ear Infections and Glue Ear

Ear infections are common in young children. They typically resolve quickly and are not usually serious. The two primary types encountered are middle ear infections (otitis media) and outer ear infections (otitis externa). Middle ear infections are most prevalent.

Following a middle ear infection, fluid often accumulates behind the eardrum. This fluid usually clears spontaneously. However, in children with recurrent infections, this fluid may persist, a condition known as glue ear. Glue ear is not an infection itself but a consequence of previous middle ear infections. It can endure for weeks or months, impairing hearing and potentially affecting language development.

Recognizing Glue Ear: Signs and Symptoms:

Swim staff should observe for the following indicators:

HEARING DIFFICULTY: The child may frequently request repetitions and/or speak loudly. This is particularly noticeable in noisy environments. In very young children, persistent hearing difficulties may delay or halt language acquisition.

EAR DISCOMFORT: The child may indicate pressure or mild pain in the ear.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES: Irritability or sleep disturbances can occur.

BALANCE ISSUES: Observe for problems with balance.

Management of Glue Ear:

OBSERVATION: If glue ear does not cause significant discomfort or developmental impact, no immediate treatment is typically required. It often resolves spontaneously over time.

PHARMACOLOGICAL INTERVENTION: In some cases, antibiotics may be prescribed to address residual infection and facilitate fluid clearance.

SURGICAL INTERVENTION

(GROMMETS): If glue ear persists for several months and causes ongoing issues, an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) specialist may recommend surgery. This procedure involves the insertion of small tubes (grommets) into the eardrum to promote fluid drainage from the middle ear.

Swimming Safety with Ear Conditions

Here are some guidelines regarding aquatic activities for children with ear conditions:

OUTER EAR INFECTIONS: Children with an outer ear infection must avoid swimming for one week following the commencement of treatment. This allows for adequate healing.

MIDDLE EAR INFECTIONS AND GLUE EAR: Swimming is generally permissible. However, it must be avoided if a perforated (torn) eardrum is present. Confirmation from a medical professional is required.

DOCTOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS: Most medical professionals advise children with glue ear or grommets to continue swimming, provided specific precautions are observed:

POST-OPERATIVE EXCLUSION: Prohibit swimming for a minimum of two weeks following grommet insertion surgery.

EAR PROTECTION: Implement the use of custom-made earmoulds or a protective headband over the ears.

CONTROLLED WATER PLAY: Advise against swimming underwater in deep water or jumping into deep water, as this can create pressure detrimental to the ear.

In summary:

Ear infections are common in young children and can occur monthly.

Middle ear infections often do not require antibiotic treatment; outer ear infections are typically managed with antibiotic ear drops.

Glue ear is fluid accumulation behind the eardrum, usually self-resolving, but may require grommet insertion for drainage.

Persistent glue ear can temporarily impact hearing and speech development. Monitor and report concerns.

For outer ear infections, mandate a one-week cessation of swimming post-treatment. For middle ear infections and glue ear, swimming is generally safe unless eardrum perforation is present.

When a child has glue ear or grommets, medical advice typically supports continued swimming with adherence to specified precautions, including ear protection or avoiding deep water activities.

DID YOU KNOW?

Open Water isn't just for swim schools. If you offer activities or programs on the beach for children or young people, we'd love to have you on our side!

For further information about Deaf Children Australia.

www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

03 9539 5300

communication@deafchildren.org.au



Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.
Revised 2025 – Copyright © Deaf Children Australia 2025

puggles

**OPEN
WATER.**

**Deaf
Children
Australia.**

Swim
COACHES & TEACHERS
AUSTRALIA
Sunnyskyes

deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY THE PHILIPS FOUNDATION