

Earache pathway – Clinical support tool for remote clinical assessment by NHS 111 clinicians

Clinical findings	Green – low risk	Amber – intermediate risk	Red – high risk
Colour Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal colour or skin, lips and tongue Responds normally to social cues Content/smiles Stays awake or wakens quickly Strong normal cry / not crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pallor Reduced response to social cues Wakes only after prolonged stimulation Infant (under 1 year) not feeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue or grey colour Unable to rouse or if roused does not stay awake Clinician concerns about nature of cry in infant (Weak, high pitched or continuous)
Respiratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of amber or red symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RR 50-60 breaths/min if aged <12 months RR >40 breaths/min if age ≥12 months Mild/moderate respiratory distress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grunting Severe tachypnoea: RR > 60 breaths/min Severe respiratory distress
Circulation / hydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of amber or red symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cold hands and feet in absence of fever Reduced urine output Not tolerating fluids 	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of amber or red symptoms 2 year and over with no amber/red features and no pus discharging from ear – antibiotics not beneficial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pus discharging from ear Child under 2 years with unilateral earache and symptom score of >8 (0=no symptoms; 1=a little; 2=a lot) for the following criteria: a) fever (>39 degrees = score of 2) b) tugging ears c) crying more d) irritability e) difficulty sleeping f) less playful g) eating less – these children are likely to benefit from antibiotics Child under 2 years with bilat earache Swelling or redness behind the ear Dizziness or losing their balance Age 3-6 months with temp ≥39° (102.2°F) with no clear focus of infection Fever for ≥ 5 days Additional parental/carer support required Lower threshold for face to face review if significant chronic co-morbidities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age 0-3 months with temp ≥38° (100.4°F) Meningism (severe headache, neck stiffness, photophobia, irritability) Seizure

GREEN ACTION

Provide earache safety netting sheet
 Confirm they are comfortable with the decisions/
 advice given.
 Always consider safeguarding issues.

AMBER ACTION

Refer to primary care service for review

RED ACTION

Refer immediately to emergency care – consider
 whether 999 transfer or parent/taxi most
 appropriate based on clinical acuity etc