

# Chloramphenicol for ear infections (otitis externa)

This leaflet is about the use of chloramphenicol ear drops to treat infections of the outer ear that are caused by bacteria (sometimes called bacterial otitis externa). They are not suitable for ear infections caused by viruses.



This leaflet has been written specifically about the use of this medicine in children. The information may differ from that provided by the manufacturer. Please read this leaflet carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again.

## Name of drug

**Chloramphenicol**

## Why is it important to take this medicine?

It is important that your child takes this medicine regularly in the way that your doctor has told you to so that it kills all the bacteria and gets rid of the infection.

## What is chloramphenicol available as?

- **Ear drops** (5%, 10% chloramphenicol); these contain propylene glycol

## When should I give chloramphenicol ear drops?


Chloramphenicol ear drops are usually given twice or three times a day.

- **Twice a day:** this should be once in the morning and once in the evening. Ideally, these times are 10–12 hours apart, for example some time between 7 and 8 am and between 7 and 8 pm.
- **Three times a day:** this should be once in the morning, once in the early afternoon and once in the evening. Ideally, these times are at least 6 hours apart, for example 8 am, 2 pm and 8 pm.

Give the ear drops at about the same times each day.

## How much should I give?

Your doctor will work out the amount of chloramphenicol (the dose) that is right for *your* child. The dose will be shown on the medicine label.

 **It is important that you follow your doctor's instructions about how much to give.**

## How should I give the ear drops?


### Before you give ear drops

- Use the ear drops only in the affected ear, unless your doctor has told you to treat both ears.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water before and after giving the drops.
- You may need help from another adult to give ear drops to your child. One of you can hold the child still and one can give the drops. You may find it helpful to wrap a small child or baby in a blanket to help keep them still.

## How to give ear drops

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water.
- Shake the bottle and remove the cap.
- Your child needs to have their head tilted to one side. (They could rest their head on a pillow.)



- Put the tip of the dropper just inside the ear hole. Try to avoid touching the nozzle on to the ear. Gently squeeze the drop(s) into the ear.
  - Your child should keep their head tilted to one side for a minute or so.
  - Wipe the nozzle with a clean tissue after each use.
  - If you think the drops didn't go into the ear, you can repeat the process but do not try more than twice.
-  Try to avoid the tip of the bottle touching any part of your child's ear if possible.
- Wash your hands again with soap and hot water.
- Repeat the above steps for the other ear if necessary.

## When should the medicine start working?

The ear drops should start working straight away, but it may take 2–3 days before your child starts to feel better. It is important that you give the whole course of ear drops in the way that your doctor has told you to, so that they kill the bacteria and get rid of the infection. **Do not stop early.**

## What if my child is sick (vomits)?

You do not need to worry if your child is sick, as the drops will still work.

## Important things to know about taking antibiotics

- It is important that your child **completes the course** of antibiotic. This means that they must take the medicine for the number of days that the doctor has told you to, or until all of the medicine has been taken. If you stop giving the antibiotic too soon, the bacteria that are left will start to multiply again, and may cause another infection. There is also a risk that these bacteria will be 'resistant' to the first antibiotic. This means that it might not work next time, and your child might need a different antibiotic, which might not work as well or cause more side-effects.
- Try to give the medicine at about the same times each day, to help you remember, and to make sure that there is the right amount of medicine in your child's body to kill the bacteria.

- Only give this medicine to your child for their current infection.
- **Never save** medicine for future illnesses. Give old or unused antibiotics to your pharmacist to dispose of.
- Only give the antibiotic to the child for whom it was prescribed. Never give it to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could do harm.
- Antibiotics only kill bacteria; they do not kill viruses. This means that they do not work against colds, sore throats, flu or other infections that are caused by viruses. Your doctor will not prescribe antibiotics for these illnesses.

## What if I forget to give it?

**If you usually give it twice a day:** If you remember up to 4 hours after you should have given a dose, give your child the missed dose. For example, if you usually give a dose at about 7 am, you can give the missed dose at any time up to 11 am. If you remember after that time, do not give the missed dose. Just give the next dose as usual.

**If you usually give it three times a day:** Do not give the missed dose. Just give the next dose as usual.

## What if I give too much?

You are unlikely to do harm if you give your child extra ear drops by mistake. If you are concerned that you may have given too much, contact your doctor or local NHS services (details at the end of leaflet). Have the medicine or packaging with you if you telephone for advice.

## Are there any possible side-effects?

We use medicines to make our children better, but sometimes they have other effects that we don't want (side-effects).

Your child is unlikely to get side-effects with chloramphenicol ear drops, although their ears may sting a little with the first few doses. If you are concerned, contact your doctor.

## Can other medicines be given at the same time as chloramphenicol ear drops?

- You can give your child medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist **before** giving any other medicines to your child. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

## Is there anything else I need to know about this medicine?

- Do not put cotton wool or anything else into your child's ears during the course of treatment.
- Once opened, chloramphenicol ear drops should not be kept for longer than 4 weeks.

## Where should I keep this medicine?

- Keep the ear drops in a cupboard, away from heat and direct sunlight. They do not need to be kept in the fridge.
- Make sure that children cannot see or reach the medicine.
- Keep the medicine in the container it came in.

## Who to contact for more information

Your child's doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about chloramphenicol and about other medicines used to treat otitis externa (ear infection).

You can also get useful information from:

### England: NHS 111

Tel 111 - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Scotland: NHS 24

Tel 111 - [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

### Wales: NHS Direct

Tel 0845 4647 (2p/min) or 111 (free)  
[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

### Northern Ireland: NI Direct

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)



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The primary source for the information in this leaflet is the British National Formulary for Children. For details on any other sources used for this leaflet, please contact us through our website, [www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)

We take great care to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct and up-to-date. However, medicines can be used in different ways for different patients. It is important that you ask the advice of your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure about something. This leaflet is about the use of these medicines in the UK, and may not apply to other countries. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the Neonatal and Paediatric Pharmacists Group (NPPG), WellChild and the contributors and editors cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of information, omissions of information, or any actions that may be taken as a consequence of reading this leaflet.