

COTTON-TIP APPLICATORS AS A LEADING CAUSE OF OTITIS EXTERNA

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Background: Otitis externa, also known as "swimmer's ear", is an inflammation or infection of the external auditory canal. Many risk factors have been identified, mainly excessive moisture in the canal from swimming. Objective: To study the epidemiology and the leading risk factors of otitis externa. Methods: Eighty-seven children aged 3.5-12 years (mean 48±4.5 months) who were diagnosed with otitis externa from December 1999 to March 2001 were studied for age, sex, cerumen cleaning habits, signs and symptoms. Findings were compared to an age-matched control group of 90 children without otitis externa. Results: Sixty-one children (70.1%) in the study group had their ears cleaned with a cotton-tip applicator during the 10 days preceding the diagnosis of otitis externa. In the control group, only thirty-one (34%) used applicators routinely during the 10 days prior to diagnosis ($p<0.001$). Other risk factors for otitis externa were swimming in a pool (23.0%), wax removal (5.8%) and ventilation tubes (1.1%). Conclusions: Use of a cotton-tip applicator to clean the ear seems to be the leading cause of otitis externa in children and should be avoided.

