This decision support tool is effective as of October 2016. For more information or to provide feedback on this or any other decision support tool, email certifiedpractice@crnbc.ca

**EAR, NOSE AND THROAT (ENT) ASSESSMENT**

Nurses with Remote Nursing Certified Practice designation (RN(C)s) are able to manage the following ear, nose and throat conditions:
- Acute otitis media
- Ceruminosis
- Dental abscess
- Pharyngitis

The following assessment must be completed and documented.

**ASSESSMENT**

**History of Present Illness and Review of System**

**General**

The following characteristics of each symptom should be elicited and explored:
- Onset (sudden or gradual)
- Chronology
- Current situation (improving or deteriorating)
- Location
- Radiation
- Quality
- Timing (frequency, duration)
- Severity
- Precipitating and aggravating factors
- Relieving factors
- Associated symptoms
- Effects on daily activities
- Previous diagnosis of similar episodes
- Previous treatments
- Efficacy of previous treatments

**Cardinal Signs and Symptoms**

In addition to the general characteristics outlined above, additional characteristics of specific symptoms should be elicited, as follows:
Ears
- Recent changes in hearing
- Compliance with and effectiveness of hearing aid
- Itching
- Earache
- Discharge
- Tinnitus
- Vertigo
- Ear trauma
- Cotton Swab use

Nose and Sinuses
- Rhinorrhea
- Epistaxis
- Obstruction of airflow
- Sinus pain and localized headache
- Itching
- Anosmia
- Nasal trauma
- Sneezing
- Watery eyes

Mouth and Throat
- Hoarseness or recent voice change
- Dental status
- Oral lesions
- Bleeding gums
- Sore throat
- Uvula midline
- Dysphagia

Neck
- Pain
- Swelling
- Enlarged glands
- Increasing headache associated with flexing of the neck

Other Associated Symptoms
- Fever
- Malaise
- Nausea or vomiting

Medical History (General)
- Medical conditions and surgeries
- Allergies (seasonal as well as others)
- Medication currently used (prescription, oral contraceptives, over the counter)
• Herbal preparations and traditional therapies

Medical History (Specific to ENT)
• Frequent ear or throat infections
• Sinusitis
• Trauma to the head or ENT area
• ENT surgery
• Hearing loss or audiometric screening results indicating hearing loss
• Seasonal allergies
• Asthma
• Chronic cough
• Meniere’s disease
• ENT cancer

Personal and Social History (Specific to ENT)
• Others at home with similar symptoms
• Smoking
• Alcohol use
• Exposure to mould
• Frequent immersion of ears in water (e.g. swimming, bathing)
• Use of foreign object to clean ear
• Use of ear protection
• Crowded living conditions
• Sexual activity
• Personal and dental hygiene habits
• Exposure to cigarette smoke, wood smoke or other respiratory irritants
• Recent air travel or scuba diving
• Occupational exposure to toxins or loud noises

PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EARS, NOSE AND THROAT

Vitals
• Temperature
• Pulse
• Respiration
• SpO₂
• Blood pressure (BP)

General Appearance
• Apparent state of health
• Appearance of comfort or distress
• Colour
• Nutritional status
• State of hydration
• Hygiene
• Match between appearance and stated age
• Difficulty with gait or balance
• Piercings and tattoos

Ears

Inspection
• Pinna: look for lesions, abnormal appearance or position. Look at the skin covering the mastoid process, behind pinna for redness or swelling, gently pull the pinna forward.
• Canal: discharge, swelling, redness, wax, foreign bodies
• Tympanic membrane: colour, light reflex, landmarks, bulging or retraction, perforation, scarring, air bubbles, fluid level
• Estimate hearing with watch or whisper test
• If whisper test fails, perform Weber and Rinne tests with a 512-hertz tuning fork

Palpation
• Tenderness over tragus or on manipulation of the pinna
• Tenderness on tapping of mastoid process
• Size and tenderness of pre, post auricular and occipital nodes

Nose and Sinuses

Inspection
• External: inflammation, deformity, discharge or bleeding
• Internal: colour of mucosa, edema, deviated or perforated septum, polyps, bleeding
• Observe nasal versus mouth breathing

Palpation
• Sinus and nasal tenderness

Percussion
• Sinus and nasal tenderness

Mouth and Throat

Inspection
• Lips: color, lesions, symmetry
• Oral cavity: breath odour, color, lesions of buccal mucosa
• Teeth and gums: redness, swelling, caries, bleeding
• Tongue: colour, texture, lesions, tenderness of floor of mouth
• Throat and pharynx: colour, exudates, uvula, tonsillar symmetry and enlargement, masses

Neck

Inspection
• Symmetry
• Swelling
• Masses
• Active range of motion
• Thyroid enlargement

**Palpation**
• Tenderness, enlargement, mobility, contour and consistency of nodes and masses
  - Nodes – Pre-and post-auricular, occipital, tonsillar, submandibular, submental, anterior and posterior cervical, supraclavicular
• Thyroid: size, consistency, contour, position, tenderness
• Parotid: tenderness (diffuse versus discrete), enlargement, mobility, contour and consistency of nodes and masses

**Associated Systems for assessment**
• A complete assessment should include the respiratory system.
• Face: inspect for asymmetry, skin changes, masses or irregularities

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**SYMPTOMS REQUIRING URGENT REFERRAL**

The first step is to determine if the ENT presentation requires an urgent referral to a physician or nurse practitioner, or can be managed safely by an RN(C).

The following signs and symptoms require referral to a physician or nurse practitioner:
• Positive Brudzinski sign (chin to chest)
• Pain and fever with mastoid tenderness
• Difficulty with secretions, drooling
• Fever of unknown origin
• Treatment failure after 3 days for otitis media, strep throat or peritonsillar abscess
• Displaced uvula
• Uncontrollable epistaxis
• Facial fractures
• Sudden onset of deafness
• Recent ENT surgery
• Hoarseness without fever or illness
• Unexplained vertigo
• Pain out of proportion to clinical findings (consider epiglottitis)

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**DIAGNOSTIC TESTS**
The RN(C) may consider the following diagnostic tests to support clinical decision-making:
• Swab of ear, nose or throat for Culture and Sensitivity (C&S)
REFERENCES

More recent editions of any of the items in the Reference List may have been published since this DST was published. If you have a newer version, please use it.


