

Why Do Newborns and Young Children Need Hearing Screening?

Children who have hearing loss are at risk of having impaired or delayed speech and language development. This will affect their ability to learn and to interact with people. Babies have the best chance for normal language development if any hearing loss is discovered early and early intervention services begin by the age of 6 months.

Most newborns can hear normally. However, one to three of every 1,000 babies born each year have some degree of hearing loss. It is difficult to tell if a baby has hearing loss in the first few months and years of life. Many babies with hearing loss can hear some sounds. They may respond to noise by startling or turning their heads toward the sound. This behavior may make parents think their baby can hear. However, this is not always the case. The baby may hear some sounds but may not hear well enough to develop full speaking ability. All babies born in North Carolina should have their first hearing screening before they leave the hospital. **Newborn hearing screening helps to find babies in need of additional screening and/or diagnostic testing for hearing loss.**

Learning starts at birth. One of the important ways babies learn is through hearing. Research shows that children who are identified with permanent hearing loss early are more likely to progress at age-appropriate rates and require few, if any, special education services if they are provided appropriate hearing aids or cochlear implants and receive early intervention from trained staff. **Timing is crucial.**

When a newborn does not pass the initial newborn hearing screening, further tests need to be done to determine if there is hearing loss. When hearing screening shows that hearing loss is present, timely intervention services should start very early in the child's life. Early intervention (EI) refers to programs and services available to children from birth to 3 years old and their families. EI provides families with the information and support they need to maximize their child's development. For some babies, EI services may include the use of sign language and/or hearing aids. **The earlier services start the better!**

Hearing screening is important for toddlers as well. Young children between the ages of 1-3 need to have their hearing tested. Children who have frequent ear infections may develop hearing loss. Other children may have a progressive hearing loss that is not detected when the child is a newborn. In addition, an illness or medication may cause hearing loss. About one to three of every 1,000 children will acquire hearing loss during the first three years of life. Each day in the life of a young child with an undetected hearing loss is a day without full access to language. The earlier a child's hearing loss is detected, the earlier speech and language problems can be identified and treated, and the less likely it is that problems will persist or get worse. **Early treatment and intervention can help children be more successful with reading, writing and interpersonal relationships.**

If a child between the ages of 1 and 3 is not learning words or responding to his or her name, it is time to ask your doctor to order hearing testing.

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month



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