The procedure is performed with a portable hand-held screening unit. A small probe, fitted with a sensitive microphone, is placed in the child’s ear canal. This probe delivers a low-volume sound stimulus into the ear.

The cochlea responds by producing an otoacoustic emission, sometimes described as an echo, which travels back through the middle ear to the ear canal. The cochlear response is analyzed by the screening unit. In approximately 30 seconds, the result is displayed on the screening unit as a “pass” or “refer.”

Children not passing are assessed by a health care provider for common ear problems. Children who still do not pass an OAE screening after medical clearance are referred to a pediatric audiologist for a complete evaluation.