



newborn
hearing
screening
& your baby



early hearing
detection &
intervention

Florida Department of Health



What can families expect as the result of newborn hearing screening?

Screening your baby's hearing assures you that, at the time of birth, your baby's hearing was checked and you were advised of the results. It lays the foundation for you and your baby's doctor to track your baby's hearing and language development in childhood.

Why should every newborn have a hearing screening at birth?

All babies born in Florida should have their hearing screened before coming home from the hospital. Babies with a family history of hearing problems, low birth weight, or certain other medical conditions have a higher risk of hearing loss at birth or a progressive condition occurring after birth. However, only half of the children with hearing loss have a known family history of hearing problems. The remaining infants with hearing loss often have no specific risk factors.

The purpose of identifying newborns with hearing loss is to prevent or minimize the effects of hearing loss on language development, academic performance and cognitive development through appropriate early intervention services.

What is newborn hearing screening?

Newborn hearing screening is a test that can detect almost all hearing loss at birth. Before your baby goes home from the hospital, his or her hearing will be screened. There are two types of screening that can be used to check a baby's hearing. Your baby may have one or both of these screenings. The screening will show if your baby can hear, or if follow-up testing is needed. Your baby will not feel any pain during either of these screenings. The screening can be done while your baby is asleep. The results of the hearing screening are available before your baby leaves the hospital.

Why is it so important?

Babies begin developing speech and language from the moment they are born. They learn by listening to and interacting with the sounds and voices around them. When these sounds and voices cannot be heard, language development is often delayed. Unfortunately, without screening hearing loss is easily undetected in the early years of life, the most important period for language development.

Hearing loss is the most common birth disorder in newborns. Approximately three to five babies of every 1,000 have some degree of hearing loss. If your baby has hearing loss in one or both ears, early detection is the key to ensuring that delayed language or development is prevented or minimized. Hearing loss that goes untreated may lead to speech and language delays, as well as social learning delays in school.

What if my baby does not pass the test?

There are many reasons your baby may not pass the first hearing screening and require a second test. Perhaps your baby was too active, too wide-awake, or you were discharged before the procedure was completed. It is important that you follow through with any recommendations made by your hospital staff, audiologist and/or physician.

Do I need to have my baby's hearing checked again if he or she passes?

Hearing loss can develop later after you leave the hospital for a variety of reasons. Your baby should be tested every year for at least 3 years if you have a family history of hearing loss. Discuss this with your physician. Ear infections that can occur as your child grows also can typically cause hearing loss.

If you ever have concerns about your child's hearing, speech or language, be sure to discuss them with your child's physician and/or audiologist.

Be sure to keep your baby and all children away from loud noise or music to prevent permanent hearing damage.

If you are concerned that your child is not developing speech and language appropriately, please talk with your primary health care provider.

For more information regarding your baby's hearing, please call your primary health care provider or contact:

speech, language & hearing guidelines

by the age of 2 months

Startles to loud sound

Quiets to familiar voices

Makes vowel sounds like "ohh," "ahh"

by the age of 4 months

Looks for sound with eyes

Begins to babble

Uses a variety of voice sounds, such as
squeals, whimpers, chuckles

by the age of 6 months

Turns head toward sounds

Begins to imitate speech sounds

Babbles ("ba-ba," "ma-ma," "ga-ga")

by the age of 9 months

Imitates speech sounds of others

Understands "no-no" or "bye-bye"

Turns head toward soft sounds

by the age of 12 months

Correctly uses "ma-ma" or "da-da"

Gives toy when asked for

Responds to singing or music

Locates sound on all levels

did you know?

Babies start hearing before birth

Approximately 3-5 of every 1,000 healthy newborns are born with a hearing loss

Over 90% of children who have a hearing loss are born to parents who have normal hearing

We don't know which babies might have a hearing loss until screened

New equipment allows babies to be screened within a few hours of birth

The screening only takes 5-15 minutes and is usually done before you leave the hospital

Some babies may need more than one hearing screening just to make sure they are hearing as they should

Many learning problems can be prevented if a baby's hearing loss is found at birth and intervention begins before 6 months of age

In some cases, infants who are born with normal hearing may acquire hearing loss as they grow

Loud sounds during events such as fireworks displays, pleasure boat rides, auto racing events, and aerobic classes can cause permanent hearing loss in infants and children