

*A Guide to*



*Maryland's Universal  
Newborn Hearing Screening Program*



**The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
Office of Genetics and Children with Special Health Care Needs**

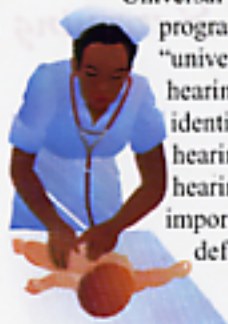
Maryland law requires that every baby born in a Maryland hospital be screened for possible hearing loss before discharge. Upon completing the hearing screening, the hospital will usually give the parents or guardians the results before discharge. These results, along with any risk factors increasing the baby's chance for a hearing loss, are also reported to Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

DHMH will send the parent and pediatrician the screening results with recommendations for follow-up. If the baby does not pass the hospital hearing screening, a repeat screening by one month of age is recommended. The repeat screening results will be reported to DHMH. The Department will again send the parent and the pediatrician the results of the repeat screening and recommended follow-up.

If the baby does not pass the one-month repeat hearing screening, it is recommended that the baby have a diagnostic hearing test by three months of age. If the baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss, DHMH can help find services that the baby may need. The Department can also help to ensure that the baby's needs are being met and communication skills are developing.



### What is Universal Newborn Hearing Screening?



Universal Newborn Hearing Screening is a program designed to ensure that every "universal" baby born is screened for hearing loss. Screening is the process of identifying babies who have normal hearing and babies who may have a hearing problem. The word *may* is an important reminder that screening is not a definitive test for hearing loss; it simply means that the baby needs further attention to determine whether or not a hearing loss requiring treatment is present.

### Why are all babies screened for hearing loss?

This can be answered in just two words: *speech and language!* Hearing is the principal way in which we develop our ability to communicate and, therefore, learn and—ultimately—be successful in life. It is now well documented and accepted that hearing-impaired babies

### How is my baby's hearing screened?



who receive appropriate intervention before six months of age will have normal or near-normal language, speech production, and social skills in later life. If treatment is not begun until after six months, significant developmental delays may result. Finally, by screening all babies, rather than only those appearing to be at risk for hearing loss, twice as many hearing-impaired infants are identified.

If, as an adult or child, you have had your hearing tested, you know that you had to "work" to provide the examiner with the information that he/she needed. This probably meant pushing a button, raising a hand, or repeating a series of words. Not so when it comes to screening a baby's hearing! Computer technology makes it possible to perform the test on very young babies. Some hospitals use a procedure that measures the ear's response to sound (called *otoacoustic emissions*—OAE for short), while other hospitals measure the brainstem's activity in response to sound (called *auditory brainstem response*—ABR). Either way, the process is completely painless and can be conducted even while the baby is sleeping!



### When will the hospital do the screening?

The baby's hearing will be screened before he/she leaves the hospital for home. The best time to screen is when he/she is quiet, happy, well-fed, and comfortable. If the baby does not pass the screening before discharge, he/she will be referred for a repeat hearing screening around the time the baby is one month old.



Working together today for their tomorrows!

**W**hat do  
the  
results mean?

If the baby *passes* the hospital hearing screen and *has no risk factors*, it is most likely that the child's hearing is within normal limits.

If the baby *passes* the hearing screen in the hospital but *has risk factors*, the child has an increased possibility of a hearing loss. You will need to have your child screened again between 6 and 12 months of age. *Remember that a problem with hearing can occur at any time in childhood.* If you become concerned about the child's hearing or speech and language development, another hearing screen should be done.

If the baby *does not pass* the hearing screening in the hospital, the baby may have a hearing loss, but not necessarily. The screening test is not definitive; it means only that hearing loss is a possibility. As such, a repeat screening is needed. The parent should receive information about where and when to take the baby for this repeat screening. The results of this repeat procedure will determine whether a complete hearing test should be done.



**W**hat is  
meant  
by "risk  
factors?"

There are various conditions that increase the chance of hearing loss in newborns. A family history of hearing loss is but one example of a risk factor for hearing loss. An explanation of risk factors will be available soon in the Department's new brochure "Risk Factors for Hearing Loss Explained."

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