

FROM: Barbara E. Arnold, MA
Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Coordinator
Newborn Hearing Screening, Children's Medical Services



Family Health Bureau, Public Health Division
1190 S. St. Francis Drive
Santa Fe, NM 87505
ph:(505) 476-8852
fax:(505) 476-8896
fax:(505) 827-5995
www.nmhealth.org

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Subject: Newborn Hearing Screening + COVID-19

Dear Screeners and Partners in Health:

Thank you for your work and your commitment to your personal health and the health of our families and communities.

As hospitals and birthing facilities evaluate service delivery during the COVID-19 health crisis, please understand that screening and reporting newborn hearing sensitivity remains an essential service and a requirement under the New Mexico Public Health Act. In-patient hospital screening before discharge is more critical now since many outpatient services have been suspended or will be delayed. Please continue to complete the Newborn Hearing Screening Form (attached) and scan and email securely to Reanna.Garcia@state.nm.us. Contact Reanna if a secure email link needs to be set up. If scan/ email is not possible, faxes can be sent to the number on the form. There is a place on the form to indicate if a baby was discharged without a screen which should be done only if absolutely necessary. If the hearing screening is not done, the referral form must still be completed and the screening should be scheduled as soon as possible.

In Dr. Hecht's message below, further explanation is provided on the essential nature of newborn hearing screening and the developmental emergency created when hearing loss goes undetected. Also for your reference is the Public Health Order issued yesterday (3-24 PHO) where Health Department Secretary Kathyleen Kunkel states on page 3(2) that disease reporting requirements of the NMPH Act remain in effect.

Please contact me if you have questions or need assistance.

Barbara Arnold

[3/26/2020 Statement from Dr. Julia Hecht:](#)

1. Universal newborn hearing screening is an essential health service under PHO 3.24.20 2.e : Delaying this service for 3 months creates an undue risk of permanent harm to the infant. Infants with congenital deafness will not be identified and will not receive services during the early neuro-linguistic critical period. The linchpin of the NM newborn hearing screening system is the inpatient birth admission screen. Failure to receive this screen will greatly risk an affected infant's identification and intervention to prevent serious lifelong cognitive impairment.

2. The importance of the inpatient birth admission hearing screen should be considered in the context of protecting the welfare of the infant and mother from COVID-19. Hospitals must address infection control issues related to the screening equipment and screening personnel.

3. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves in New Mexico, health care delivery will likely be impacted in broad ways and over a prolonged period of time. Therefore, in order to locate and screen all infants discharged without a hearing screen, it is imperative that the completed referral form be retained on site and submitted to DOH/CMS for every infant. Every unscreened infant must be tracked after discharge and receive a newborn screen as soon as is possible.

Julia

Julia L. Hecht, MD, FAAP
Chapter Champion, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention
New Mexico Pediatric Society