

Fact Sheet

Can your child hear?



Because approximately 1 in 500 babies are born with a hearing loss, all babies in NSW are now offered an accurate hearing screen at birth, using special technology. By detecting hearing loss in the first days of life, a child will be able to receive the early intervention necessary to develop normal speech and language.

However, sometimes hearing loss can develop months or years later, even though a baby passed the original screening at birth.

Temporary hearing loss

Some children develop temporary hearing loss (“glue ear”) due to fluid in the middle ear (behind the eardrum). This may follow a cold or sometimes occurs “out of the blue”. If your child appears to have hearing loss for longer than a week, a hearing test should be organised and your child needs to go to the family Doctor or Ear Nose and Throat Specialist.

Permanent hearing loss

Some children gradually acquire a permanent hearing loss. This may occur anytime, even in adolescence. A child is usually unaware of the hearing loss.

Your child’s hearing needs to be checked if your child is:

- not hearing properly
- has unclear speech
- not speaking at the same level as other children of the same age
- having difficulty learning to read or spell.

What makes my child at risk?

Certain conditions make a child more susceptible to hearing loss:

- deafness in the family
- prematurity (born too early) or weight less than 1500 g at birth
- baby very ill at or around the time of birth
- meningitis or encephalitis (infection of the brain and/or its coverings)
- viral infections during pregnancy eg, rubella, cytomegalovirus
- birth defects of the ear, nose, face or neck.

Parents and grandparents are usually the first people to realise that a child has a hearing loss.

Meningitis: testing the hearing is important

Many children who suffer meningitis or encephalitis can become partially or completely deaf. All children who have had meningitis or encephalitis should have a hearing test before they leave the hospital or within two weeks of discharge.

Where can my child be tested?

It is difficult to test hearing accurately unless it is done properly by trained staff in a sound proof room.

Older children can be tested at audiology units:

- in some public hospitals
- in some community health centres
- in some ENT specialist rooms
- at Australian Hearing – telephone 13 17 97.

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Young children and babies need special testing. You may ring the following units:

- The Children's Hospital at Westmead Audiology Department – telephone 98452788
- Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick Audiology Department – telephone 93822274
- The Jim Patrick Audiology Centre at North Rocks – telephone 98720828
- The Children's Cochlear Implant Centre – telephone 98446800
- Northside Audiology – telephone 94196999
- Macquarie University Audiology Department – telephone 98508746
- Australian Hearing – telephone 13 17 97.

- If you think your child is not listening, not hearing properly, their speech is unclear or their speech is not at the level of children the same age, your child's hearing needs to be tested and the ears should be checked by your family doctor and/or specialist.

If a child has significant hearing loss and gets help quickly (often including hearing aids and early intervention) many problems such as poor speech and school difficulties can be avoided.

Remember

- Hearing can be tested at any age.
- Everyone must be alert for hearing loss in infants and children.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional

the children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

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