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What is Universal Newborn Hearing Screening?

Universal Newborn Hearing Screening is a mandatory test to a check a baby's hearing after birth, before leaving the hospital.

- All babies should have their hearing tested before they leave the hospital
- If a baby is born at home, a hearing test should be completed before he or she is 1 month old.

When a baby fails the screening tests, he or she is referred for more detailed, diagnostic hearing testing. If a hearing loss is found, hearing aids and therapy services are initiated to help the baby learn to listen and speak.

Why is Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Important?

It is important to find hearing loss as early as possible because babies start learning how to use sound as soon as they are born. Listening in the first months of life prepares babies to speak. These early steps are building blocks for communication.

- Babies start by babbling, using many of the sounds they hear spoken around them
- By their first birthday, babies are already learning what words mean and may be saying a few words

Babies learn to talk by listening to their families talk around them. Imagine that a baby has a hearing loss, but no one knows about it. This can lead to slow development of speech and language, leading to problems in school later in life.

Hospitals regularly screen newborn babies for a number of conditions, such as genetic disorders. Hearing loss is more common than any other problems or conditions that are screened for at birth. About **one to three babies** out of every **1,000** will be born with a **permanent hearing loss.**

What Does It Mean If A Baby Fails The Newborn Hearing Screening Test?

When a baby does not pass the newborn hearing screening test, this does NOT necessarily mean the baby has a hearing loss. Across the nation, between 20 to100 babies per 1000 (2-10%) do not pass the screening test. Only one to three babies per 1000 (less than 1%) actually have hearing loss. This means that most of the babies referred for follow-up testing will be shown to have normal hearing.

You may wonder why a baby with normal hearing would fail the newborn hearing-screening test. There are several common reasons:

- Vernix in the ear canal
- Fluid in the middle ear
- Movement and/or crying during the test

Even though most babies will pass the follow-up hearing testing, it is VERY important to take your baby for follow-up testing. This is the best way to be SURE about your baby's hearing.

Can a Baby Pass the Test and Still Have Hearing Loss?

Although it doesn't happen very often, sometimes babies can pass a hearing test and still have hearing loss. Some mild hearing losses or losses that affect only some pitches may not be picked up by the screening test.

Some infants have hearing loss that is not present at birth. These babies are born with normal hearing, but develop a hearing loss after the newborn period. This condition may result from certain illnesses or from some genetic causes.

Hearing loss after the newborn period might also happen because of the use of certain medications or as a result of trauma or disease.

If your baby has risk factors for these types of hearing loss or if you have concerns about your child's responses to sound or speech development, you should discuss this with your baby's doctor.

It is important to keep in mind that regardless of your baby's age, there are safe, effective and accurate tests that can be used to determine how well your baby hears.