

Why does my baby need to have a hearing test?

Hearing loss is the most common birth defect in the United States. Every year, one to three babies out of every thousand will be born with a permanent hearing loss. 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. Early identification and early intervention are the keys to successful communication development. We know that starting intervention by six months of age gives children with hearing loss the best chance of developing normal language and communication skills. This is why it is so important to have a newborn's hearing screened and any necessary follow up testing initiated as soon as possible. For additional information please call the Infant Hearing Program at 410-767-5803 or 1-800-633-1316. TTY 866-635-4410. Please visit our website at http://fha.maryland.gov/genetics/inf_hrg.cfm.

How do you test a baby's hearing?

There are two different types of tests used to screen hearing in babies. Both of these tests are safe and comfortable for your baby.

Otoacoustic Emissions:

One of the tests is called otoacoustic emissions or OAEs. For this test, a miniature earphone and microphone are placed in the ear, sounds are played and a response is measured. If a baby hears normally, a sound is reflected back into the ear canal and measured by the microphone.

Auditory Brainstem Response

The second test is called auditory brainstem response or ABR. For this test, sounds are played in the baby's ears and band-aid like electrodes are placed on the baby's head to detect responses. This test measures how the hearing nerve responds to sounds and can identify babies who have a hearing loss.

Why should I have my baby's hearing retested if my baby responds to sound?

It is a good sign if you are noticing that your baby is responding to sound. However, the only way to be sure that your baby is hearing normally is to have him tested. A baby who has a mild hearing loss or a loss in only one ear will respond to sound, but these types of losses can lead to difficulties with speech and language development. They can also create safety issues that you will need to be aware of. Additionally, as the baby gets older, this type of loss can cause the child to appear to have behavioral problems and could affect the child's academic success. All of these problems can be avoided or minimized if the baby gets appropriate, timely intervention. To be most effective, intervention needs to begin before six months of age.

Where can I go to have my baby's hearing tested?

The second hearing screening can often be done on a return visit to the birth hospital. If not, or if your baby needs a full hearing evaluation, your pediatrician can refer you to an audiologist. If you need any assistance or further information, please contact the Infant Hearing Program at 1-800-633-1316. If you have concerns about your baby's hearing don't delay. Have your child's hearing tested by an audiologist as soon as possible. Remember, early identification and early intervention are the keys to successful communication development.