

Milestones in your baby's hearing

The hearing screen measures your baby's hearing responses at the time of the screen only. Sometimes babies can develop a temporary or permanent hearing loss at a later age. It is important to monitor your baby's hearing as he/she grows. Use these milestones as a guide and seek medical advice if you are unsure.

Birth to three months

- Is startled by or jumps when there is a sudden noise.
- Stirs, wakes up or cries when someone talks loudly or makes a noise.
- Recognises your voice and quietsens when you speak.

Three to six months

- Turns eyes towards an interesting sound.
- Appears to listen to voices and other sounds.
- Awakes easily to sound.

Six to twelve months

- Turns head to soft sounds.
- Understands "no" and "bye-bye".
- Begins to copy speech sounds.

If you miss your screen, please contact your birth hospital.

For more information about the screening program, contact: (08) 6456 0037

WA Newborn Hearing Screening Program
Email: hearingscreening@health.wa.gov.au

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Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service

Perth Children's Hospital
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands WA 6009
Telephone: (08) 6456 2222

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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Your newborn baby's hearing screen

WA Newborn Hearing Screening Program



In the first few months of life, it is very hard to tell if your baby can hear by watching their behaviour. Your baby needs to be able to hear all soft speech sounds to develop their speech and language. A free hearing screen is available to all babies born in WA.

Why screen my baby's hearing?

- Approximately 1-2 babies in every 1,000 are born with a hearing loss in both ears. Most babies have no known family history or risk factors.

Newborn screening of babies enables this condition to be identified and managed quickly.

- Early treatment helps your baby's speech, language and learning development.
- Early intervention provides parents with support and information as soon as possible.

How is the screen performed?

Your baby's hearing will be screened by Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR). Three separate leads are gently placed on your baby's forehead, back of the neck and near the shoulder using small lightly adhesive pads.

A small earphone 'cup' is gently placed over each of your baby's ears. Soft clicking sounds are played, and the screening machine measures the responses from your baby's ears.

The screen doesn't hurt your baby in any way.

When is the screen done?

- Screening may be done at any time after your baby's birth, usually before you leave the hospital.
- You will be asked (usually before the birth) whether you would like your baby to have the screen.

What if my baby misses the hearing screen in hospital?

If you are discharged from hospital before your baby completes their screen, please contact the birth hospital for an outpatient screening appointment. If your baby transfers between hospitals, discuss with the nursing staff on your new ward. It is really important your baby completes their screen.

The results

The results will be discussed with you straight after the screen and noted in your baby's medical notes.

- Pass result
 - Indicates that at the time of the screen your baby hears at a level that will enable him/her to develop normal speech and language skills.
- Refer result
 - In some babies, an irregular result may occur due to something other than hearing loss, such as:
 - Fluid or other matter that has entered the ear canal during the birth process.
 - Temporary middle ear fluid.
 - Your baby being too restless.

Follow-up screen

If your baby does not pass their first screen, a follow-up screen will be arranged. It may be completed before discharge from hospital. If this is not possible, you will be offered an appointment in an outpatient clinic. It is really important to attend.

If there are any concerns about your baby's hearing after the follow-up screen, you will be referred to a paediatric audiologist. The audiologist is specially trained to test the hearing of babies and young children.

Risk factors for hearing loss

A few rare causes of hearing loss are not picked up by the standard hearing screen. With some conditions, a baby's hearing may be normal at birth but gradually worsen over time.

Children with any risk factors listed below should be tested by an audiologist.

- A strong family history of permanent hearing loss from birth or early childhood.
- Exposure to a congenital infection such as Toxoplasmosis, Rubella, Cytomegalovirus, Herpes or Syphilis.
- Syndromes associated with hearing loss such as Down syndrome.

If your baby has one of the above mentioned risk factors, please inform the person who is performing the hearing screen.

