

## Hearing & Amplification

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### Newborn Screening

#### What Is Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS)?

Simple, inexpensive and safe tests are now available to check hearing in the first days of life. It is no longer necessary to wait until a child is old enough to take a formal hearing test in order to check for hearing loss. Newborn hearing tests are important for families, because much can be done if hearing loss is caught early in a baby's life.

Hearing screening programs are called "universal" because the goal is to test all newborn babies. This means that babies in both the regular and intensive care nurseries are screened before they leave the hospital (or within 3 weeks of hospital discharge). Many people refer to screening programs by the name Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI). This title is popular because detecting a hearing loss is just the first step.

If a hearing loss is detected, the next step is intervention. Intervention may include hearing aids or hearing devices, and services to support the family and baby in learning communication skills. It is important for all babies to be screened, but not all babies are born in hospitals. Individual states may have different requirements for babies who are born at home. Ideally, babies born at home should be tested before they are two months old.

The following links may be helpful:

[www.infanthearing.org](http://www.infanthearing.org)  
[www.colorado.edu/slhs/mdnc/](http://www.colorado.edu/slhs/mdnc/)  
[www.infanthearing.org/ehdi.html](http://www.infanthearing.org/ehdi.html)

#### Why Is Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Important?

You might be wondering why it's important to detect hearing loss so early. It is remarkable how quickly babies start to learn language and speech. Listening in the first few months of life prepares the baby to learn language.

By the first birthday, infants are already figuring out what words mean. Before their first birthdays, they babble many of the sounds they hear spoken around them. These early steps are building blocks for communication.

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Babies learn language by tuning in to family talk. Now suppose a baby has a hearing loss and no one finds this out. This can lead to slow development of speech and language. It can create difficulties in family communication. Delays in speech and language can also lead to school problems, both academic and social. Finding hearing loss early helps to prevent these delays.

Hospitals routinely screen babies for some specific problems, like PKU (PKU is an abbreviation for Phenylketonuria. Children born with this rare genetic disorder cannot metabolize a part of protein in food). Interestingly, hearing loss occurs more often in babies than any of the other problems that are screened for at birth. Approximately one to three babies out of 1000 will be born with permanent hearing loss. Because this represents an important public health concern, many hospitals are participating in hearing screening programs.

### 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 to 100 babies per 1000 (two-10 percent) do not pass the screening test. Only one to three babies per 1000 (less than 1 percent) 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
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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.**