

Newborn Hearing Screening

What is Newborn Hearing Screening?

Newborn Hearing Screening was rolled out across the UK in March 2006, following many years of campaigning by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) and other deaf organisations. All babies are now offered a hearing screen within a few days of birth.¹

What does the screening test involve?

The screen uses two quick and simple tests to see if there is a need for further investigation. These are called the Otoacoustic Emissions test (OAE) and the Automated Auditory Brainstem Response test (AABR). Both tests are painless for the baby. The majority of areas provide the screening test as part of maternity care in hospital. The test is generally carried out by specially trained hearing screeners. Some areas offer the screen in community clinics or at home, done by health visitors or hearing screeners.

What happens next?

Babies who do not show strong responses to the two screening tests will be referred on for a full diagnostic assessment of their hearing. This will be done at a local audiology department or sometimes offered at home. One to two babies in every 1000 born will have some level of hearing loss in one or both ears.

In England, the quality standards for the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHSP) contain standards for information sharing across health, education and social care services, as well as standards on giving advice to parents. This is unique in postnatal services in that it is a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach looking at the holistic needs of the child. This means that parents should be offered the information, advice and support they need at the time of a child's diagnosis of deafness which can be an incredibly anxious and stressful.

Why is Newborn Hearing Screening Important?

Although deafness is not a learning disability, 65% of deaf children in England fail to get 5 grades A* to C at GCSE, including English and Maths, and there is no evidence to suggest that the situation is any better in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. With the right support from the beginning, there is no reason why deaf children should not achieve as well as their hearing peers. Deaf children are also

¹ Screening is delivered by the NHS in England, Wales and Scotland, and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in Northern Ireland.

40% more likely to experience mental health problems than other children. Newborn Hearing Screening is vital to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life. It is a highly cost effective way to ensure that children born deaf now have the opportunity to develop language and communication at the same rate as their hearing peers. It also saves money in the long run as deaf children get the right support from an early age and can go on to achieve at school and become independent adults.

What is the future of Newborn Hearing Screening?

Anne Milton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health has stated in answer to a parliamentary question that under the current reform of the NHS in England, *“Public Health England will be responsible for funding and ensuring the provision of screening services in the future. Part of its role will be to design and provide quality assurance and monitoring for all screening programmes including the NHS Newborn Hearing Screening Programme.”*

NDCS would welcome support from parliamentarians to ensure that the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme in England remains the high quality successful programme it is today under the new structure of the NHS.

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