

Pointers For Parents-To-Be

Hearing Screening For Newborns Important For Development

(NAPSA)—Babies begin to develop speech and language from the time they are born. They learn by listening and interacting with the sounds and voices around them. But when a baby is born with hearing loss, many sounds and voices are not heard, and the child's speech and language development can be delayed.

Each year in the United States, as many as 12,000 babies are born with a hearing loss. The cause of hearing loss for many babies is not known and hearing loss can go unnoticed for years. Fortunately, almost all states, communities and hospitals now offer hearing screening for all babies. The hearing screening is easy and painless and can identify whether more testing is needed. In fact, babies are often asleep while being screened. It takes very little time—usually only a few minutes.

"It is important to identify hearing loss early," said Alison Johnson, acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. "Early identification allows fami-



lies to make decisions about their child's care that can affect speech, language, cognitive (thinking) and social development."

All infants should be screened for hearing loss before 1 month of age. It is best if they are screened before leaving the hospital. If the baby does not pass the hearing screening, it's very important to make an appointment for a full hearing test and any needed medical tests before the baby is 3 months of age.

A professional trained to test hearing loss, such as an audiologist, or an ear, nose and throat doctor, will be able to perform

these tests. The baby's doctor should perform or order any needed medical tests to find out the cause of the hearing loss. Because a newborn baby can pass the hearing screening and still develop a hearing loss, the baby's doctor should routinely follow the baby's general health, development and well-being.

"The goal for every newborn child with hearing loss is to receive medical, audiologic, educational and support services no later than 6 months of age," said Johnson. "Receiving services at an early age will help the child develop communication and language skills that will last a lifetime."

Every state has an Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program that works to identify infants and children with hearing loss and promotes timely follow-up testing and services for any family whose child has a hearing loss. If your baby has a hearing loss or if you have any concerns about your baby's hearing, call (800) CDC-INFO toll-free or visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi to learn more about this topic and available services.