Newborn hearing screening

Newborn blood spot screening **will continue** throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

About 1 in every 1,000 babies is born with a significant hearing loss. The aim of the screening programme is to reduce the effects of permanent childhood hearing impairment on the development of speech and communication skills, through early diagnosis and treatment.

The screening test involves placing a small, soft tipped earpiece in the outer part of a baby's ear to send clicking sounds to the inner ear. Using a computer, the person carrying out the test can see how the baby's inner ear responds to sound. If normal responses are not found, the infant is referred to audiology services for diagnostic tests and further follow up.

The priority for the newborn hearing screening programme, at present, will be to **maximise the numbers of babies who complete newborn hearing screening prior to discharge** from hospital. Routine outpatient appointments, for the purposes of completing newborn hearing screening, have been temporarily paused at this time as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Those babies who are unable to complete screening at present will be offered screening at a later date.

Those with parental responsibility should note that, at present, the optimum time to participate in, and complete newborn hearing screening, is prior to discharge from the maternity unit.

If you or your baby are being tested, or have tested positive, for Covid-19 or have symptoms associated with the virus, hearing screening will be deferred and you will be offered screening at a later date.

As always, the person with parental responsibility should continue to be vigilant and check your baby's hearing, as they grow up, using the checklist contained in the Personal Child Health Record ('PCHR / red book'). Any concerns about your baby's hearing should be discussed with your health visitor or GP.

Further information can be found at the NI Maternity and Parenting Website www.ni-maternity.com or on NI Direct https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/newborn-screening

Newborn blood spot screening

Newborn blood spot screening **will continue** throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there have been some changes made to how you receive postnatal care. You may be asked to take your baby into your local health centre or clinic for blood spot screening. This will depend on what Trust you are from. Your midwife will discuss this with you.

For additional advice on COVID-19 for pregnant women and parents in Northern Ireland, please see the following website - https://www.ni-maternity.com/antenatal-care/

In the first week after birth, all babies in Northern Ireland are offered screening for a range of inherited conditions including phenylketonuria (PKU), congenital hypothyroidism (CHT), cystic fibrosis (CF), medium chain acyl coA dehydrogenase deficiency (MCADD) and sickle cell disorders (SCD). From March 2020 this will also include the offer of screening for maple syrup urine disease (MSUD), isovaleric acidaemia (IVA), glutaric aciduria type1(GA1) and homocystinuria (HCU).

This screening test is often referred to as the ‘heel prick’ test. Most babies screened will not have any of these conditions but, for the small number who do, the benefits of screening are substantial. The programme makes a major contribution to the prevention of disability and death in our community, through early diagnosis and effective interventions.

Newborn blood spot screening is a complex programme, involving a wide range of services, from highly specialised laboratories through to individual staff in the community and in hospitals, working closely together. The Public Health Agency and partner organisations are responsible for ensuring that the population has access to safe, effective, high quality and equitable screening programmes.

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