

# I. Your Baby's Hearing Screen



Information for parents

**Northern Ireland  
Newborn Hearing  
Screening Programme**

**NINHSP**

Revised 2015

# Your Baby's Hearing Screen

**Your baby will be given a series of routine health checks in the first few weeks of life. This will include a hearing screen. The hearing screen uses a quick simple test to check the hearing of all newborn babies.**

## **Why screen my baby's hearing?**

A small number of babies are born with a hearing loss. The screen allows most of these babies to be identified early. Early identification is important for the development of the baby. It also means that support and information can be provided to the parents at an early stage.

## **No one in my family has a hearing loss. Does my baby still need to have the screening test?**

Yes. It is important to screen all babies. One to two babies in every 1,000 is born with a hearing loss in one or both ears. Most are born into families with no experience or history of hearing loss.

## **When will the screening test be done?**

The screening test will be done in the maternity unit before you go home or within the first few weeks of life. The test only takes a few minutes.

## **Will the screening test be painful for my baby?**

No. It does not hurt and it is usually done while the baby is sleeping.

## **What does the screening test involve?**

A trained hearing screener carries out the screening test at the bedside or in a quiet place. They place a small soft tipped ear piece in the outer part of your baby's ear which sends clicking sounds down the ear. When the inner part of the ear receives a sound it usually produces an echo. Using a computer the screener can see how your baby's ear responds to sound.

This is called the Otoacoustic Emission Test (OAE).

## **When will I get the results?**

The results will be given to you as soon as the screening test is complete.

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## What do the results mean?

If the screening test shows a strong response from both of your baby's ears, this means that your baby is unlikely to have a hearing loss. In your baby's personal child health record (PCHR) 'red book' there is a section which gives advice about sounds your baby should react to and the types of sounds that they should make as they grow older. If you ever have any concerns regarding your baby's hearing, discuss them with your health visitor or GP.

If the screen doesn't show a strong response from one or both ears it does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss. A follow up screen is carried out. Some common reasons for having a second test are:

- The baby was unsettled at the time of the test;
- There was background noise at the time of the test;
- There was fluid or a temporary blockage in the ear.

## What does the follow up involve?

The follow up will be done before you leave hospital or an appointment will be made for an outpatient clinic.

The OAE test is usually repeated but if you are leaving hospital early or there are no clear responses with the repeat OAE test your baby will have an Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR) test. This involves three small sensors being placed on your baby's head. Headphones are put over baby's ears and a series of clicking sounds are played. A computer measures how well your baby's ears respond to the sounds.

This test can take longer than the OAE and you can stay with baby while the screening is done. This test is carried out while baby is sleeping.

## My baby seems to be responding to sound. Is follow up hearing screening necessary?

Most babies are found not to have a hearing loss after the follow up screen but it is still important that your baby has the follow up screen. This is because babies who have a hearing loss will still react to some sounds. If your baby has a hearing loss it is important to find out as soon as possible.

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# Your Baby's Hearing Screen



## What happens if the follow up shows strong responses?

This means your baby is unlikely to have a hearing loss. However it is still important that you remain vigilant about your baby's hearing. Contact your health visitor or GP if you have any concerns in the future, as problems may arise later.

## What happens if the follow up screening test does not show a strong response from both ears?

If there is not a strong response from one or both of your baby's ears you will be referred to your local audiology department. They will carry out special tests to measure your baby's hearing. This often happens and does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss. Further tests by the audiologist will give you better information about your baby's hearing. You will be given a leaflet explaining what this involves.

## What is the likelihood of my baby having a hearing loss?

Most babies will record strong responses at the follow up screen and at the further tests carried out by the audiologist. However there is the possibility that your baby may have a hearing loss. Finding out that your baby has a hearing loss early means that you and your baby will get advice and support right from the start.

## What we do with your baby's screen information

Information about your baby's newborn hearing screen results are recorded in his/her 'red book' and on the child health (computer) system (CHS). We share hearing screen results with your family doctor, health visitor and staff who provide newborn hearing screen and audiology services in the area where you live. Please refer to pages i and ii of the PCHR, if you would like to find out more about what information is collected, how it is stored and used and with whom it is shared.

### Telephone contact details of your local newborn hearing screen office:

Belfast HSC Trust: 028 9063 3558  
Northern HSC Trust: 028 2563 5674  
South Eastern HSC Trust: 028 9056 4748  
Southern HSC Trust: 028 3861 3834  
Western HSC Trust: 028 7134 5171 ext. 216115

For further information about newborn hearing screening contact:

**The National Deaf Children's Society**

NDCS info Freephone Helpline: 0800 800 8880 (voice and text)  
Fax: 020 7251 5020 E-mail: [helpline@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:helpline@ndcs.org.uk) Web: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

This leaflet and translations are available to view/download at:  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/newborn-hearing-screening](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/newborn-hearing-screening)

*This leaflet is based on a patient information leaflet previously published by NDCS.*