

## 2. Your Baby's Hearing Screen

For babies who are in or have been in neonatal intensive care, or special care baby units.



Information for parents

**Northern Ireland  
Newborn Hearing  
Screening Programme**

**NINHSP**

Revised 2015

# Your Baby's Hearing Screen

**The newborn screen for babies who are in, or who have been in neonatal intensive care, or special care baby units.**

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 two simple tests to check the hearing.

## **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 child. It also means that support and information can be provided to the parents at an early stage.

## **Is there a risk my baby may have a hearing loss?**

There are some known factors which may put a baby at risk of having a hearing loss. These include:

- Baby has needed intensive care in early infancy;
- Some medical conditions;
- Other members of baby's close family, who have had a hearing loss since birth or very early childhood.

## **When and where will the screening take place?**

The screening will usually be done before your baby leaves hospital. If this does not happen an appointment will be arranged for you.

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

No. It does not hurt. It is usually done while your baby is asleep. No anaesthetics or sedatives are used.

## **What do the screening tests involve?**

A trained hearing screener carries out the screening tests. There are two parts to the screen.

### **1. The Otoacoustic Emission Test (OAE).**

The screener will 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.

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OAE Test

## 2. The Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR)

Small sensors are placed on baby's head, shoulder and nape of neck. Soft headphones are placed over baby's ears and a series of clicking sounds are played. A computer measures how baby's ears respond to sound.

Both screening tests are simple, completely safe and painless. You can stay with your baby through the screen. If your baby is in a baby care unit and you are not always able to visit in the daytime, the screening may be done in your absence.

### What do the results mean?

#### If the screening tests show a strong response from both of your baby's ears:

This means that your baby is unlikely to have a hearing loss. However, it is important to check your baby's hearing as they grow up. In some cases further checking may be arranged for your baby even if clear responses are shown at the screen.

In your baby's personal child health record (PCHR) 'red book' there is a section about the 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 you should discuss them with your health visitor or GP.



#### If the screen doesn't show a strong response from one or both ears:

This often happens and does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss. Some common reasons for not having a strong response 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.



If the screener does not get a clear response in both ears you will be given an appointment to bring your baby to the audiology clinic where further tests will be carried out to measure 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 clear responses at the screening test and any further tests carried out by the audiologist. About 3 in every 1000 babies who have spent at least 2 whole days in intensive care have a hearing loss. Finding out early if a baby has a hearing loss means the parent and baby will get appropriate 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)**

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.*