



Hearing screening for your new baby

It is important to know if your baby can hear

The first months and years of a baby's life are very important for developing language. Undetected hearing loss is one of the causes of delayed language development. Delayed language development can lead to behavioural and emotional problems and, later, to problems in school.

Every year in Ontario, about three in 1,000 babies are born deaf or hard of hearing. Through Ontario's Infant Hearing Program, these babies can be found very early and given the help they need to develop language.

Even if your baby does not have a known risk factor for hearing loss, it is still very important to have the hearing screening. In Ontario, you can now choose hearing screening by itself or expanded hearing screening.

Hearing screening

Hearing screening identifies infants at risk for hearing loss as early as possible. The technology used for the hearing screening is completely safe and reliable. It will not hurt your baby. The screening involves placing a very small microphone in your baby's ear and soft sounds are played. The ear's response to these sounds is measured and analysed. In some cases, three small electrodes are placed on your baby's head to measure the brain's response to sounds. Both tests are very reliable, only take a few moments, and you will get results right away.

Most babies will pass the hearing screen. This means their hearing is fine at that time.

In a very small number of babies who pass hearing screening, a hearing loss may develop at a later age. It is therefore important to watch for signs of hearing loss as your baby grows. The developmental milestones in this brochure will help you know what to look for.

Some babies will receive a refer result. This means your baby needs follow-up hearing screening. It does not always mean that your baby is deaf or hard of hearing. A slight cold or stuffiness, earwax, fidgeting, or even noise in the room can cause a refer result.

However, because finding those babies who are deaf or hard of hearing is so important, all babies with a refer result must have an additional hearing screen. This may take place in the hospital or a community-based setting. If your baby needs another hearing screen, it is very important that you keep the appointment.

Expanded hearing screening

The expanded hearing screen includes both the hearing screen that happens in a hospital or community-based setting and the hearing loss risk factor blood spot screen. You can consent to the hearing screen alone, or the expanded hearing screening.

The hearing loss risk factor blood spot screen is performed by Newborn Screening Ontario on a dried blood spot already taken for the purposes of newborn blood spot screening (heel prick test). It can detect cytomegalovirus (CMV) infections. CMV is a common virus. When a pregnant woman is infected there is a risk of infection of the baby. When this happens it is called congenital CMV (cCMV) infection. Most infants with cCMV will not have signs or symptoms, however, some can develop hearing loss because of the infection. This is one of the reasons expanded hearing screening is being offered.

The hearing loss risk factor blood spot screen will be performed, with your consent, when there has been an Infant Hearing Program recommendation that your baby see an audiologist for a hearing assessment.

Once completed, all results will be sent to the Infant Hearing Program. If the results require follow-up (a positive result means that CMV was detected) they will also be sent to your closest Follow-Up Centre Infectious Diseases clinic. Someone from Newborn Screening Ontario or the Infectious Diseases clinic will contact you directly to talk about the results and arrange an appointment.

Early hearing screening is important

Hearing screening is the first step in finding babies who are deaf or hard of hearing. There are many services in place to help these infants. Children whose hearing loss is identified early and who receive the support they need, will have the same chance to develop language as hearing children.

Regional Infant Hearing Programs

Ontario's Infant Hearing Program services are provided through regional offices.

For more information about the Infant Hearing Program including the hearing screen, follow-up services and for contact information, please visit: www.ontario.ca/infantheating

For more information about the hearing loss risk factor blood spot screen, please visit: www.newbornscreening.on.ca

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Developmental milestones

These developmental milestones show some of the skills that mark the progress of young children as they learn to communicate. There are also some tips on how you can help your child develop speech and language skills. If your child is not meeting one or more of these milestones, please contact your local Preschool Speech and Language Program.



By 6 months

- turns to source of sounds
- startles in response to sudden, loud noises
- makes different cries for different needs – I'm hungry, I'm tired
- watches your face as you talk
- smiles and laughs in response to your smiles and laughs
- imitates coughs or other sounds – ah, eh, buh

By 12 months

- follows simple one-step directions – "sit down"
- looks across the room to something you point to
- uses three or more words
- uses gestures to communicate – waves "bye bye", shakes head "no"
- gets your attention using sounds, gestures and pointing while looking at your eyes
- brings you toys to show you
- "performs" for attention and praise
- combines lots of sounds as though talking – abada baduh abee
- shows interest in simple picture books

By 24 months

- follows two-step directions – "Go find your teddy bear and show it to Grandma"
- uses 100 or more words
- uses at least two pronouns – "you", "me", "mine"
- consistently combines two or more words in short phrases – "daddy hat", "truck go down"
- enjoys being with other children
- begins to offer toys to peers and imitates other children's actions and words
- people can understand his or her words 50 to 60 per cent of the time
- forms words and sounds easily and effortlessly
- holds books the right way up and turns pages
- "reads" to stuffed animals or toys
- scribbles with crayons

Babies like it when you:

- Get down to their level so they can see your face. This tells them that you're interested in what they're doing and saying. It makes it easier to interact with you.
- Repeat the sounds they make. Babies enjoy making noises, and like it when you imitate them over and over.
- Sing and laugh, especially when you are feeding, bathing, and changing them. Remember to talk to your baby throughout the day about things you do and see – "Mommy's putting on her coat", "That's a big truck"
- Tell them the names of the objects they are looking at and playing with. Babies are interested in exploring and learning about new things, and like to hear what things are called.

By 9 months

- responds to his/her name
- responds to the telephone ringing or a knock at the door
- understands being told "no"
- gets what he or she wants through sounds and gestures, for example, reaching to be picked up
- plays social games with you, for example, peek-a-boo
- enjoys being around people
- babbles and repeats sounds – babababa, duhduhduh

By 18 months

- understands the concepts of "in and out", "off and on"
- points to several body parts when asked
- uses at least 20 words
- responds with words or gestures to simple questions – "Where's teddy?", "What's that?"
- demonstrates some pretend play with toys – gives teddy a drink
- makes at least four different consonant sounds – b, n, d, g, w, h
- enjoys being read to and looking at simple books with you
- points to pictures using one finger

By 30 months

- understands the concepts of size (big/little) and quantity (a little, a lot, more)
- uses some adult grammar – "two apples", "bird flying", "I jumped"
- uses more than 350 words
- uses action words – run, spill, fall
- begins taking short turns with other children, using both toys and words
- shows concern when another child is hurt or sad
- combines several actions in play – feeds doll then puts her to sleep; puts blocks in train then drives train and drops blocks off
- puts sounds at the start of most words
- produces words with two or more syllables or beats – "ba-na-na", "com-pu-ter", "a-pple"
- recognizes familiar logos and signs – stop sign
- remembers and understands familiar stories

Toddlers like it when you:

- Let them touch and hold books while you point to and name the pictures.
- Use real words instead of baby talk – "give me" instead of ta ta or "water" instead of wawa.
- Take the time to listen to them – they want you to hear all of their new sounds, words and ideas.
- Give them simple directions to follow – "Go find your red boots".
- Use lots of different words when you talk to them – opposite words like up/down, in/out; action words like "running", "splashing"; and descriptive words like "happy", "big", "little", "clean", "dirty".
- Encourage them to play with other children – at the library, play groups, park.