

Hearing Loss

FACT SHEET

What is hearing loss in children?

Some children are born deaf or hard of hearing. Most children also experience mild, temporary hearing loss when fluid gets in the middle ear from allergies or colds. Sometimes as a result of an ear infection, fluid stays in the middle ear, causing hearing loss and delays in your child's speech. While it is not common, some children do have permanent hearing loss. This might be mild (they don't hear as well as you do) or complete (where they can't hear anything at all). Hearing loss can vary greatly among children and can be caused by many things.

What are some of the signs of hearing loss?

The signs and symptoms of hearing loss are different for different children. If you see any of these signs, call your child's doctor or nurse:

- does not turn to the source of a sound by 3 to 4 months of age
- pays attention to vibrating noises or noises that can be felt, rather than heard
- does not say single words, such as "dada" or "mama" by 1 year of age
- turns head when he or she sees you but not if you only call out his or her name: this usually is mistaken for not paying attention or just ignoring, but could be the result of a partial hearing loss
- hears some sounds but not others

What causes hearing loss? Can it be prevented?

Hearing loss can happen any time during life – from before birth to adulthood. Babies born early or who have low birth weight might have problems that lead to hearing loss, but this can happen to full-term, normal weight babies as well. Illnesses, injuries, certain medicines, and loud noise levels can cause children and adults to lose hearing.

Some causes of hearing loss can be prevented. For example, vaccines can prevent certain infections, such as measles, that can cause hearing loss. Another cause that can be prevented is a kind of brain damage that happens when a newborn baby has too much jaundice. This is called "kernicterus," and can be prevented by using special lights (phototherapy) or other therapies to treat babies with jaundice before they go home from the hospital.

What can I do if I think my child might have hearing loss?

Talk with your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor think your child might have hearing loss, ask that a hearing test be given as soon as possible. To have your child's exact levels of hearing measured, see an audiologist or an ear, nose, and throat doctor (ENT, otolaryngologist). If your child is under age 2 or does not cooperate for the hearing exam, a test (called brain-stem evoked-response audiometry) could be given. This test allows the doctor to check your child's hearing without having to rely on your child's cooperation. Your child will not be hurt; most babies even sleep through the test.

Hearing loss can affect a child's ability to develop speech, language, and social skills. The earlier a child who is deaf or has a hearing loss starts getting services, the more likely the child's speech, language, and social skills will reach their full potential. Services can be received through your local early intervention agency or public school. To find out who to speak to in your area, contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities by logging on to www.nichcy.org/states.htm or calling **1-800-695-0285**. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has links to information for families (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd).

1-800-CDC-INFO

www.cdc.gov/actearly



Learn the Signs. Act Early.