

BC Early Hearing Program Information for Parents

Early hearing screening for your baby

The BC Early Hearing Program (BCEHP) is a province-wide program for early hearing screening and intervention.

Knowing that your baby has good hearing is important. Babies start to learn speech and language from the moment they are born. If your baby can't hear well, he or she may have problems learning to talk and develop language skills. Newborn hearing tests are important for families because much can be done if hearing loss is caught early in life.

Why screen my baby's hearing?

About one of every 300 babies is born with a hearing loss in one or both ears. This number increases for babies who require special care at birth. It is not easy to identify that a young baby has a hearing loss by simply watching his or her behaviour. Without early screening, many babies with hearing loss go undetected. Even if no one in your family has a hearing loss, it is important to have your baby's hearing screened. Most babies born with a hearing loss are born into families with no history of hearing loss.

Your baby's hearing screening test.

While you are in the hospital you will be offered a hearing screening test for your baby. A BCEHP-trained hearing screener conducts the test. The test uses quick, simple and safe methods to check the hearing of newborn babies. If your baby is not screened in the hospital, screening can be done at your closest public health hearing screening clinic.

One of two screening tests will be used: either the Automated Otoacoustic Emission (AOAE) test or the Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR) test. For the AOAE screening, a small soft-tipped earpiece is placed in the outer part of the baby's ear, and sounds are sent into the ear. When the ear receives the sound, the inner part, known as the cochlea, produces a response that can be measured.

For AABR screening, soft headphones specially made for babies are used. The headphones are put over the baby's ears, and a series of clicking sounds are made. Small sensors are placed on the baby's forehead, neck and cheek or shoulder. In both tests, the hearing screening equipment shows how well the baby's ears respond to sound.

AOAE screening takes only a few minutes if a baby is quiet or asleep. Screening usually takes longer for the AABR test, up to 30 minutes.



Will the hearing screening test be painful for my baby?

No, the test does not hurt and is not uncomfortable. The screening test will usually be done while your baby is asleep or settled.

When will I get the results of the hearing screening test?

The results will be given to you at the time of the screening test. You will also be given some information to take home with contact numbers in case you have any questions.

Why do some babies need two screening tests?

Many babies have clear responses on the first screening and do not need another screening. Some babies do not show a clear response from both ears on the first screening and need to have another hearing screening. This does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss.

Some reasons for having a second screening test are:

- The baby may have been unsettled at the time of screening.
- There may have been background noise when the screening test was carried out.
- The baby may have fluid or a temporary blockage in the ear after birth. This is quite common and usually clears on its own.
- The baby may have a hearing loss.

My baby seems to be responding to sound. Does my baby still need a second hearing screening test?

Even though most babies will show clear responses at the second screening test, it is still very important that your baby have the second test. This is because babies who have hearing loss will usually still react to some sounds. If your baby does have a hearing loss, it is important to find out as soon as possible.

If the second screening test results are not clear, does that mean my baby likely has hearing loss?

If the results of the second screening test are not clear, an in-depth hearing test will be carried out by a specially trained BCEHP audiologist. About one in 20 babies whose second screening test does not show clear responses has hearing loss in one or both ears.

What does a “pass” screening result mean?

A “pass” screening result means your baby had clear responses for both ears and that it is unlikely that he or she has a hearing loss. However, children can develop a hearing loss later during childhood, so it is important to have your child’s hearing checked if you have any concerns.

At the time of screening, babies are also checked for factors which may put them at risk for later childhood hearing loss. If your baby has one of the following risk factors, follow-up testing will be recommended:

- immediate family member with permanent childhood hearing loss
- cleft palate
- certain syndromes
- certain serious early health problems

The best way to be sure about your baby’s hearing is to attend all follow-up appointments.

Other programs (e.g. the neonatal follow-up clinic or cleft palate program) may request hearing checks for your baby. If you are called for appointments by more than one program, please let your service provider know. Usually you do not need to attend both appointments if they are close together.

How is information about my baby shared?

The BC Early Hearing Program (BCEHP) is a service of BC Children’s Hospital and the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). To help us provide services to your family, the BCEHP may need to share information about your child with professionals who provide services to families as part of the program. These professionals may be in other hospitals, hearing clinics, health units, child development centres, early intervention programs, schools, preschools and/or child care centres.

Personal information is gathered under the *BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The information is used by the BCEHP to help us determine how well we are meeting families’ needs, how we can improve our program and services and how we can assure quality of care. Information may be used for research, as outlined in the *BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, section 35.

For more information about the collecting and sharing of information by the BCEHP, contact the program director at 250-519-5725 or the privacy officer in your local health authority.

For more information about the BC Early Hearing Program, visit the BCEHP website at www.phsa.ca/earlyhearing or call 1-866-612-2347

Health authority hearing clinic contact information

BC Early Hearing Program

A service of BC Children’s Hospital
and the Provincial Health Services Authority

