

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Can your child hear?

Because approximately 1 in 500 babies born have a hearing loss, all babies in Australia are now offered an accurate hearing screen at birth, using special technology. In NSW, this is often referred to as SWISH screening (State Wide Infant Screening - Hearing). By detecting hearing loss in the first days of life, intervention will be able to start at an early age. This will give the child the best chance of developing normal speech and language.

However, sometimes hearing loss can develop months or years later, even though a baby passed the original screening at birth.

Temporary hearing loss

Some children develop temporary hearing loss ("glue ear") due to fluid in the middle ear (behind the eardrum). This may follow a cold or sometimes happens "out of the blue". If your child appears to have hearing loss for longer than a month, a hearing test with an audiologist (hearing specialist) should be organised and your child needs to go to the family doctor, Paediatrician or Ear Nose and Throat Surgeon.

Permanent hearing loss

Some children gradually acquire a permanent hearing loss. This may occur anytime, even in adolescence. A child may be unaware of the hearing loss.

Your child's hearing needs to be checked if your child is:

- not hearing properly
- needing the TV up loud
- has unclear speech
- not speaking at the same level as other children of the same age
- having difficulty learning to read or spell
- becoming disinterested or disruptive in class.

What makes my child at risk?

Certain conditions make a child more susceptible to hearing loss:

- deafness in the family
- prematurity (born too early) or with a weight less than 1500 g at birth
- your baby having been very ill at or around the time of birth
- meningitis or encephalitis (infection of the brain and/or its coverings)
- viral infections during pregnancy eg, rubella, cytomegalovirus
- birth defects of the ear, nose, face or neck or a cleft palate.

Parents and grandparents are usually the first people to realise that a child has a hearing loss.

Meningitis: testing the hearing is important

Many children who suffer meningitis or encephalitis can become partially or completely deaf. All children who have had meningitis or encephalitis should have a hearing test before they leave the hospital, or within two weeks of discharge.

Where can my child be tested?

It is difficult to test hearing accurately unless it is done properly, by trained audiologists in a sound proof room.

Older children can be tested at audiology clinics:

- in some public hospitals
- in some community health centres
- in some ENT specialist's office
- at Australian Hearing (if less than 3 years old) – telephone 13 17 97.

Young children and babies need special testing and special facilities. You may ring the following units:

- The Children's Hospital at Westmead Audiology Department – telephone 9845 2788
- Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick Audiology Department – telephone 9382 2274
- John Hunter Children's Hospital Audiology Department – telephone 4921 3548
- The Jim Patrick Audiology Centre at North Rocks – telephone 9872 0872
- Northside Audiology – telephone 9419 6999
- Macquarie University Audiology Department – telephone 9850 2900
- Australian Hearing – telephone 1300 412 512.

If a child has significant hearing loss and gets help quickly (sometimes including hearing aids, cochlear implants and early intervention) many problems such as poor speech and school difficulties can be avoided.

Remember

- Hearing can be tested at any age.
- Everyone must be alert for hearing loss in infants and children.
- If you think your child is not listening, not hearing properly, their speech is unclear or their speech is not at the level of children of the same age, your child's hearing needs to be tested and the ears should be checked by your family doctor and/or specialist.