



Suspected hearing loss in babies and children

Deafness, or hearing loss, happens when one or more parts of the ear aren't working effectively. The terms 'deaf', 'deafness' and 'hearing loss' are often used in place of each other to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or short-term hearing loss such as glue ear.

Does my baby or child have a hearing loss?

Any hearing loss, even if it's short term or mild, can have a big impact when babies and children are developing fast and can affect their speech and language, learning and behaviour. Most deafness in young children is short term and caused by glue ear. One in five pre-school children have short-term deafness at any one time.

Newborn Hearing Screening

- All babies in the UK will be offered a newborn hearing screening test, ideally within the first 4 to 5 weeks after they are born. The test can be done for babies up to the age of 3 months.
- The screening test is very quick and gives the result straightaway. It helps identify babies who have permanent hearing loss as early as possible. This means families can get the support and advice they need right from the start.
- It's not always possible to get clear responses from the first test. This happens with lots of babies and it does not always mean your baby has permanent hearing loss. It could mean:
 - your baby was unsettled when the test was done
 - there was background noise
 - your baby has fluid or a temporary blockage in their ear.

[More information on Page 2](#)

For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 13/09/2022.

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Signs of hearing loss in babies and children

The newborn hearing test does not pick up all types of hearing loss. Children can also develop permanent hearing loss later on, so it's important to check your child's hearing as they grow up. It's also important to attend all hearing appointments in case your baby or child does have a permanent hearing loss.

Your baby's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) (sometimes known as the 'Red Book') has a checklist to help you to look out for signs that your baby can hear, such as:

- startling at loud noises
- responding to your voice, even when they can't see you
- making babbling sounds.

All babies develop at different rates but if your baby or child stops making new sounds, or changes how they respond to sounds, then this could be a sign of hearing loss.

By the age of one year, many babies will be saying their first words such as "mama" or "dada". They will be able to respond to songs and will also be turning, looking, or copying lots of sounds, even very quiet ones.

Causes of hearing loss in babies and children

Some babies and children may lose their hearing permanently due to:

- having a childhood illness or virus
- genetic factors
- a head injury or injury to the ear.

How do I know if my baby or child has an ear infection?

Your baby or child may be generally unwell, off their food and have low energy levels. They may show signs of discomfort or pain by pulling and tugging at their ear.

The symptoms of an ear infection usually start quickly and may include:

- redness, itching and irritation around the ear
- discharge running out of the ear
- difficulties with swallowing or chewing
- a high temperature.

Speak to your GP about the ear infection if:

- your child has one infection after another
- it doesn't clear up after a few days
- there is a discharge from the ear
- you suspect your child may have a hearing loss or a change in hearing.

Your baby's hearing will be checked:

- within a few weeks of birth (newborn hearing screening)
- between 9 months to 12 months (health visitor review)
- from 2-2.5 years (health visitor review)
- at 4-5 years of age when they start school (school nurse check).

You can talk about your baby or child's development, hearing, and communication and speech, at any of these checks.

All parents want the best for their children, so it's natural to worry about your child's hearing or communication and whether they have a delay. You can also speak to your health visitor or GP at any time between these checks if you are worried. They will help you get the support you need.

Communication with your baby or child

Top communication tips

- Get their attention before starting to talk to them
- Face them and keep eye contact
- Try not to cover your face when speaking.
- Keep background noise to minimum (for example - turn off the TV when talking)
- Use gestures and facial expressions to help
- One person to speak at a time
- Hard floors and surfaces make it harder for people to hear. Carpets and soft furnishings help to absorb background noise and echo
- Avoid sitting in front of a window which will put your face in shadow (making it harder to lip read)
- Speak clearly and normally and repeat or say things in a different way to make sure your child has understood.

Further information:

The [National Deaf Children's Society \(NDCS\)](#) is the leading charity for deaf children. The NDCS is there for every deaf baby, child, and their family - no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate. The NDCS has a free helpline: **0808 800 8880**. They offer free, independent information and advice, and all their publications are free of charge to members. Membership is free and you can register via their [website](#).

The [BBC Tiny Happy People](#) have lots of useful resources, simple activities and play ideas to help you develop your baby or child's language skills.

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