

Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program

Your baby's hearing screen





What is newborn hearing screening?

Your baby will have a number of routine health checks soon after birth - a newborn hearing screen is one of those checks. It's a free, quick and simple way to check your baby's hearing. The newborn hearing screen identifies those babies who need to go on to have a full hearing test. In Victoria, the newborn hearing screen is done by the Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program (VIHSP).

Why is screening important?


A small number of babies are born every year with a hearing loss. As they grow, this hearing loss can affect their developing speech and language skills so early identification and assistance is important. Hearing loss might not be obvious to family in the first few weeks of life, but the hearing screen can usually detect it.


At VIHSP, we aim to help find out as early as possible whether any Victorian baby has a hearing loss. Early detection means that all families can get good advice and support right from the beginning, giving babies with a hearing loss the best possible start in life.

What if my baby cannot be screened in hospital?

Some babies might not get their VIHSP screen before they leave hospital. This might be due to a quick discharge for you and your baby, or because your baby was not settled enough to be able to do the screen. If your baby does not get screened before they leave hospital, we will contact you to arrange a suitable time to do the screen.

For babies who are in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, or Special Care Nursery, or who were born before 34 weeks gestation, we will do a screen as close as possible to the time that your baby is ready to go home from hospital.





When and how is a hearing screen done?


We try to screen babies as soon as possible after birth, as long as they are well and settled. During the screen, the hearing screener will place small stick-on sensors onto your baby's forehead, shoulder and back of the neck, and soft earcups over both ears. These will be attached to an Automated Auditory Brainstem Response (AABR) unit. Soft clicking sounds are played into your baby's ears through the earcups. The stick-on sensors detect your baby's response to the sounds.

Once your baby has settled or is asleep, the screen usually takes less than ten minutes. The screen is painless and will not usually unsettle your baby. You are welcome to stay with your baby and you can hold or breastfeed your baby during the screen.

We will ask for your written consent before screening your baby. If you would prefer your baby not to have a hearing screen, please let the VIHSP hearing screener know. We will ask you to sign a separate decline form. If you change your mind and decide later that you do want your baby's hearing screened, this can be arranged.

How will I find out the result?

You will be given the result as soon as the screen is completed. The results may suggest that your baby needs to have another newborn hearing screen or be referred for more detailed testing by an audiologist. Extra testing might be needed if your baby was unsettled during the screen, or had a temporary blockage (e.g. fluid) in their ear. Being referred for more detailed testing does not necessarily mean that your baby has a hearing loss.





What happens after screening?


We will record the result of your baby's screening in your baby's My Health and Development Record. If your baby is screened while still in hospital, we will record the result in the hospital notes too.

Your baby's results will also be recorded in the VIHSP database. This is a confidential, secure and monitored record. You can ask for a copy of the information at any time. The VIHSP database is used to monitor and evaluate the newborn hearing screening program. If the information is used for research purposes, information that identifies you or your baby will not be used. If you would like to know more about what happens to your baby's information please ask to speak to the VIHSP Area Manager. (contact details are on the back of the brochure).

If your baby needs to be referred for further testing, the Early Support Service provides extra support. If your baby is having further testing, VIHSP might need to share birth details, contact details and screening/audiology results with your baby's audiologist, doctor, Maternal and Child Health nurse, the Victorian Deaf Education Institute, early childhood intervention services or other health and education professionals. This is so that health professionals can review results, and plan for the right services for your baby, or for any treatment needed.

Hearing can change over time

It is important to pay attention to your baby's hearing as they grow. If you are concerned about your baby's hearing, their speech or language development, even if they passed the hearing screen, you can always arrange another hearing test. Simply ring an audiology clinic directly, or ask your Maternal and Child Health Nurse or family doctor to arrange it for you. VIHSP may be notified of your baby's hearing results.





FAQs

My baby responds to loud noises so why should they be screened or referred to audiology?

Hearing loss is more complex than simply being able to hear loud sounds. Most babies with hearing loss will still react to loud sounds. The important sounds for speech and language development are soft sounds and these are difficult to test in newborns without specialist equipment.

Is screening safe? What are the risks of screening?


Hearing screening is quick and safe. Your baby might experience some brief discomfort when the earcups are removed. There is a small risk that the hearing screen might not pick up a baby who is born with hearing that needs further investigation.

What are the risks of not screening for hearing? Are there any alternatives to screening?

The main risk of not having a hearing screen is delay in diagnosis if a baby has a hearing loss. Early diagnosis allows for early assistance which gives babies with a hearing loss the best possible start. There are no alternatives to newborn hearing screening.

Remember

Hearing can be tested at any age



Any questions or concerns?

Contact VIHSP

Talk to a VIHSP screener

VIHSP Head Office (details below)

VIHSP Area Manager

VIHSP Head Office

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