



Hearing Loss in Children

Hearing plays an important role in the social and emotional development of children. Without good hearing, learning to speak can be difficult. It is important to recognize early the signs of hearing loss and to prevent or lessen any concerns.

What can I do to protect my child's hearing?

Often hearing loss is not preventable. You can help protect your child's hearing by keeping your child away from loud noise such as fireworks and power tools and from harmful substances such as cigarette smoke.

Getting your child vaccinated helps prevent illness that can cause permanent hearing loss.

What can affect my child's hearing?

The most common causes of temporary hearing loss in children include:

- Ear infections
- Fluid in the middle ear
- Cleft palate

Some common causes of permanent hearing loss in children include:

- Genetic hearing loss in the family
- Low birth weight – less than 1200 grams (2.65 pounds)
- Some infections present at birth such toxoplasmosis, cytomegalovirus, or rubella
- Neonatal intensive care stay of more than 5 days
- A difficult birth which affected breathing
- Some syndromes
- Very high bilirubin levels at birth that require exchange transfusion
- Disorder of the brain or nervous system
- Childhood illnesses such as measles, mumps, encephalitis, or meningitis
- Excessive noise exposure

What are the speech and language milestones for my child's age group?

Birth to 3 months of age

- startles or cries at loud sounds
- becomes quiet or smiles when spoken to
- makes cooing sounds

4 to 6 months

- moves eyes in direction of sounds
- pays attention to music
- notices toys that make sounds
- babbles using many speech-like sounds
- uses a variety of pitches in squeals, whimpers and chuckles

7 to 12 months

- turns and looks in the direction of sounds
- recognizes words for common items such as cup, juice, and shoe
- begins to respond to requests such as 'come here' or 'do you want more'
- imitates different speech sounds
- starts saying first words such as mama and dada around first birthday

1 to 3 years

- points to body parts when asked
- follows simple commands
- says more words every month
- starts to put 2 words together

2 to 3 years

- follows 2 requests at a time, such as get the toy and put it on the chair
- listens to stories for a longer period of time
- uses 2 to 3 words to talk and ask for things
- is understood by familiar listeners most of the time

What can I do if I think my child has hearing loss?

Hearing loss can be hard to detect. Mild hearing loss is sometimes mistaken for other concerns, and it may cause a child to appear distracted or withdrawn.

Parents are usually the first to know if there is a concern.

If you have concerns about your child's hearing, contact your local public health hearing clinic or your family doctor.

See your doctor right away if your child has any of the following:

- ear discharge (runny ear)
- earache (pain in the ear)
- bad smell from the ear canal
- reddened skin around the ear
- an object in the ear canal

Is hearing loss temporary or permanent?

Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent. Temporary loss is often called conductive, and permanent hearing loss is called sensorineural. Most hearing loss in young children is temporary or medically treatable.

A test by an audiologist will determine what type of hearing loss your child has. An audiologist is a person who has special training in hearing testing and treatment.

For More Information

For information on hearing tests for children, see HealthLink BC File [#71b Hearing Tests for Children](#).

For information on hearing loss in adults, see HealthLink BC File [#71c Hearing Loss in Adults](#).

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.