

Hearing loss in children

Hearing is important for your child's social and emotional growth. The ability to hear well also supports your child as they learn to talk and eventually to read and write. It is important to have your child's hearing tested if you ever have concerns that they are not hearing well or talking clearly.

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

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 Mild hearing loss is sometimes mistaken for other concerns, and it may cause a child to appear distracted or withdrawn.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 notice if there is a problem.

Have your child's hearing tested by an audiologist if you ever have concerns, even if your child has had a normal hearing test before. Contact your local public health hearing clinic or your family health care provider to find out more about making a referral.

See your health care provider right away if your child has any of the following:

- Ear discharge (fluid draining from ear)
- Earache (pain in the ear)
- Bad smell from the ear canal
- Reddened skin around the ear
- An object in the ear canal
- An injury to the ear

Can hearing change?

Yes, hearing can change over time. These changes in hearing can be either temporary or

permanent. Most hearing loss in young children is temporary or medically treatable.

What can affect my child's hearing?

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

- Fluid in the middle ear
- Wax build-up that blocks the ear canal

Some common causes of permanent hearing loss in children include:

- Genetic hearing loss, even if there is no one else in the family with hearing loss
- Childhood illnesses such as meningitis, measles, mumps or encephalitis
- Some infections present at birth such as cytomegalovirus (CMV), toxoplasmosis or rubella
- Certain syndromes, like Down syndrome, Pendred and Alport
- Low birth weight – less than 1200 grams (2.65 pounds)
- Neonatal intensive care stay of 2 or more days
- Being on a ventilator or receiving extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) treatment as a newborn
- Very high bilirubin levels at birth that need an exchange transfusion
- Receiving certain medications in the newborn period
- Disorder of the brain or nervous system
- Excessive or prolonged noise exposure without use of ear protection

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

Often hearing loss is not preventable. However, you can help protect your child's hearing by having them wear hearing protection in noisy environments such as at fireworks and sporting events, and by keeping children away from harmful substances such as cigarette smoke. For more information on how second-hand smoke can harm babies and children, see [HealthLinkBC File #30a The harmful effects of second-hand smoke](#).

Also, getting your child immunized helps prevent illnesses that can cause permanent hearing loss.

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

Birth to 3 months old

- Startles or cries at loud sounds
- Becomes quiet or smiles when spoken to
- Makes cooing sounds

4 to 6 months old

- Moves head 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 old

- Turns and looks in the direction of sounds
- Recognizes words for common items such as cup, juice or 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 12 months old

1 to 2 years old

- Points to body parts when asked
- Follows simple commands
- Says more words every month
- Starts to put 2 words together

2 to 3 years old

- 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 people who are around them most of the time

For more information

For information on hearing tests or hearing loss see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #71b Hearing tests for infants and children](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #71c Hearing loss in adults](#)

For more information on childhood immunization, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #50a Your baby's immune system and vaccines](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50b The benefits of immunizing your child](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50c Childhood vaccines are safe](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50d Childhood vaccines: What is in the vaccines and why](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #50e A better immunization experience for your child](#)

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