



## **A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC**

### *Hearing Key to Early Education*

*Better Hearing and Speech Month — United States, May 2010*

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*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

A child's education begins long before he or she enters school. By listening to the sounds of the environment, an infant begins to develop speech patterns and communication and social skills. Undetected hearing problems can delay a child's progress in these areas which can affect academic achievement later in life.

Steve Richardson is a health educator with CDC's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program. He's joining us today by phone to discuss the importance of having your newborn screened for hearing loss. Welcome to the show, Steve.

[Mr. Richardson] Thanks.

[Dr. Gaynes] Steve, how many children have some degree of hearing loss?

[Mr. Richardson] It seems like, in the United States, each year, more than 12,000 babies have some kind of hearing loss at birth, and so that's about three out of every thousand births. Of course, children can develop hearing loss after birth, so if you include children and teenagers, about 15 percent of that group have some kind of hearing loss with one or both ears and it may be temporary or it may be permanent.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why is early detection of hearing loss so important?

[Mr. Richardson] An infant will start developing speech, language, and social skills as their brain develops and any kind of problem with hearing or deafness can get in the way of developing speech, language, and social skills and reaching their full potential.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can a parent tell if their newborn is having hearing problems?

[Mr. Richardson] Well, the first thing, of course, is the screening that happens usually in the hospital. But there're also some signs aside from that. Sometimes babies don't startle at loud noises. They don't turn to the source of a sound. They don't say single words like "da-da" or "ma-ma" by the time they're one year old. And they may turn their head when they see you, but not if you call out their name. Sometimes people think that's just not paying attention, but it could be the result of some kind of hearing loss.

[Dr. Gaynes] If a newborn's hearing test in the hospital was not normal, what should a parent do?

[Mr. Richardson] They should get in touch with the baby's doctor and say they'd like to have a full hearing test, and usually that's done by an audiologist who's a specialist in doing this kind of very full evaluation. And we try to urge parents to do that no later than three months of age for the child. And then, if a baby still, after this full examination, if they say, "Yes, in fact, there is some kind of hearing situation here, then, the parent should get the child hooked up with some support services, no later than six months.

[Dr. Gaynes] Steve, even if the initial hearing test was fine, should a parent have their child's hearing checked later on?

[Mr. Richardson] Yes, if a parent or anyone else who knows a child well thinks the child might have a hearing loss, it's very important to get some kind of hearing screening or testing done and there are some children who are at special risk of having a hearing problem that develops later, that doesn't show up right at birth, and those children, who may be at additional risk, should have at least one hearing test at about age two or two and a half years.

[Dr. Gaynes] What treatment options are available for infants who are hearing-impaired?

[Mr. Richardson] Fortunately, there're quite a few and there's no one single intervention that's right for everybody. Each family needs to make its own choice, based on its desires and their child's situation. But a lot of times, the help that people get will involve working with a team of people to help the family communicate with each other. Some families get a hearing device, like a hearing aid. Others learn, what they call manual communication and sign language, which is an official language, and there're other sorts of technical assistance and tremendous support groups, too, which is very helpful for most families.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about hearing impairment in infants?

[Mr. Richardson] The best place to start, I think, is at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and in the search box that shows up at the top, just type in "child hearing."

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Steve. I've been talking today with CDC's Steve Richardson about the importance of screening for hearing loss in newborns.

Remember, all infants should be screened for hearing loss by at least one month of age, preferably before leaving the hospital. If a problem is found, further testing by an audiologist should be done no later than three months of age. Early detection and intervention are keys to ensuring a child has a chance to develop the skills necessary to learn and interact with others.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.