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## HEALTH HEED

### Detecting Hearing Loss in Newborns

#### What Should Parents Know about Hearing Loss in Newborns?

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All of us know that educated parents can play a critical role not only in the prevention of hearing loss and deafness among their kids but also in early detection processes to stay on track with their hearing, speech, language and communication skills.

Hearing loss in newborns occurs in at least one out of every one thousand births. Most of these cases are connected to inheritance factors and the rest are connected to different diseases.

The early identification of hearing loss permits the initiation of treatment and rehabilitation of the infant with hearing loss at a very young age. He/she can later learn more normal speech skills if hearing loss is identified early and intervention begins.

#### Why are some people born with hearing loss or deafness?

If there is a history of risk factors that includes any of the following, the newborn should have a hearing assessment to check his/her hearing.

- Inter family marriage, especially in families with deafness history.
- Difficult or unordinary delivery.



Hearing loss in new borns occurs in at least one out of every one thousand births

- Low birth weight (less than one kg) and/or prematurity.
- Assisted ventilation or oxygenation to help newborn with breathing for more than 10 days after birth.
- Low Apgar scores (numbers assigned at birth that reflect the newborn's health status)
- Severe jaundice after birth (the skin becomes yellowish).
- Mother's illness during pregnancy (for example, German measles or rubella)

- Others issues

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However, studies have shown that only about half of all babies diagnosed with a hearing loss actually have a known risk factor for hearing loss. This means that the cause is never identified in about half of the babies with hearing loss. For this reason, some countries have instituted a universal hearing screen so that all babies have their hearing screened before they go home from the newborn nursery.

#### Early detection: first and second

- Many parents still think that the newborn has either full ordinary hearing or no hearing (deafness). Actually, hearing loss can range from a mild impairment to profound loss. They may also think that the hearing of their babies is normal if he or she is responding to sounds and voices. However, we have to know that there are many subtle gradations between normal hearing and deafness.

- Many of us know that most babies who are born with hearing loss are raised as a person who is hard of hearing. What does it mean? It means that they use speech and their remnants of hearing for communication, perhaps supplemented with speech or lip reading. They probably will be fitted with hearing aids or in cases of more severe hearing loss, a Cochlear Implant. Children with more severe losses may also use Cued Speech, but still their primary language is a spoken language.



With the advancement in technology, doctors can now perform accurate hearing assessments within a few hours of birth

- Children who are born with profound hearing loss or deafness may be taught either speech and speech reading (or perhaps even Cued Speech), or signs for communication. Remember that sign language for them is an essential human right that all of us must respect.

- Until recently, parents often didn't discover that their child was born with a hearing loss or deafness until the child failed to learn to speak. By that time, critical time was lost in the crucial child's language development period. Together, parents and care providers should do their best not to lose it.

- A child with undetected hearing loss may not be able to develop normal speech and language or acquire the cognitive abilities including knowing, thinking, and judging that are needed for learning. Children whose hearing loss is not identified until, for example, 2 or 3 years of age may suffer from permanent damage of speech, language, and learning. For example, it is common for a child with moderate hearing loss to develop speech and language and yet miss over half of what is being said. A child in this situation will have a weakness in development and learning and will often reach a point where advancement stops unless the hearing loss is detected and management and special education begin.

- Thanks to the advancement of technology, which is widely available and affordable even in most of rural areas and primary health care settings, doctors can now perform accurate assessments of hearing in children starting within a few hours of birth.

- The degree of hearing loss often determines the impact it will have on the child throughout life. However, with early identification and partnership between parents and care providers, the impact can be lessened.